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An exploration of Chinese students' learning experiences in China-Australia '2+2' articulation programmes: In between two systems

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Abstract

Research has broadly explored the topics of transnational higher education (TNHE) and the forms of TNHE (e.g. articulation programmes) in the Chinese context from many perspectives, such as developmental history, policy, and quality assurance. Notably, Australia is one of the active partners cooperatively running articulated education programmes with China. Enrolling in an articulation programme, for example, under the 2+2 mode, students usually study in China for the first two years and then they physically move to an Australian university to complete the remaining two years of learning. Due to this particular setting, students usually engage in the process of intercultural adjustment. Various theoretical frameworks for conceptualising the process of intercultural adjustment have been proposed, for example, the stress-adaptation-development model. However, there has been limited research that attempts to investigate the learning experiences and intercultural adjustment issues of Chinese students in China-Australia articulation programmes, precisely, the 2+2 setting. This study thus aimed to investigate Chinese students' learning experiences in China-Australia 2+2 articulation programmes using the lens of intercultural adjustment.

A case study based qualitative inquiry was adopted to explore students' learning experiences. As students' voices are essential for reflecting upon educational quality, it is necessary to explore their stories to reveal under-researched issues critically and in greater depth. As a former student of a 2+2 programme, I realised that there are many inherent differences in 2+2 programmes compared with other pathways regarding learning processes, cross-system issues, and potential values. Through detailed interviews with twelve Chinese students who had completed their Chinese stage and were studying in Australia under 2+2 programmes, I collected data about their learning experiences in China and Australia. Then, I critically analysed data by using both inductive and deductive lenses. My individual experiences added to the analysis and data presentation via reflective-narratives, which made me dynamically shift roles between being a former 2+2 student and currently a doctoral researcher in this study. My multiple roles as both insider and outsider in relation to the research helped me understand the experiences of the research participants, as well as my own in a comparative perspective.

The learning trajectories of these students indicated that they experienced changes regarding their senses of agency, identity, and belonging as 2+2 students. Specifically, most students were able to

actively engage in intercultural adjustment processes in the move from China to Australia. In contrast, some participants experienced this journey with passive and negative attitudes. This study also found that the 2+2 setting created an in-between learning space that provoked students to dynamically shift their senses of agency, identity, and belonging during cross-system learning. The contours of the in-between learning space were shaped by Internet-based technology, assessment modes, teaching strategies, and university academic contexts. These factors not only ensured that students experienced educational differences, but also enabled them to adopt flexible views and utilise multiple strategies to adapt to Chinese and Australian systems with associated complex learning experiences. The differences between these elements in the two systems indicated that there were many academic gaps between programme partners, which potentially influenced the quality and experience of learning. On the one hand, this study found that learning in 2+2 programmes was a process that encouraged students to have a sense of in-betweenness, as they continually (re)shaped their senses of identity, agency, and belonging to understand and be able to deal with cross-system differences of various kinds. On the other hand, their various experiences also reflected the existence of an in-between space, which provoked complex and dynamic reactions to these educational differences.

Consequently, this study makes several contributions to the research literature. First, students' 2+2 learning experiences not only partly affirmed the stress-adaptation-development model but also demonstrated that not all students could reach the final development stage with progressive attitudes. Second, this study suggested an in-between learning space in the 2+2 model, which offers an original perspective to understand students' learning journeys in articulation programmes. Third, the researcher, as an in-betweener in the study, provided an additional distinctive lens for understanding intercultural learning and adjustment processes in articulation programmes. For implications and recommendations, this study argues that universities should carefully consider the cultural and educational differences between different countries and take account of these in designing and managing such articulation programmes. More consideration needs to be given to the learning-related elements in articulation programmes to make intercultural adjustment more fluent. There needs to be better articulation between the parts of 2+2 programmes. Potential students should also be given a critical awareness of the possible trajectories of learning in such an educational setting. More importantly, such learning processes, as this research demonstrates, provide a lens to critically view students as in-betweeners, who continuously shift between the home and host contexts with a

sophisticated sense of changing and flexible agency, identity, and belonging.

Declaration by Author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, financial support and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my higher degree by research candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. I have clearly stated which parts of my thesis, if any, have been submitted to qualify for another award.

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Publications during candidature

Peer Reviewed Articles

Dai, K. (2018). Learning between two systems: A Chinese student's reflexive narrative in a China-Australia 2+2 articulation program. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education.* doi: 10.1080/03057925.2018.1515008.

Dai, K., Lingard, B., & Reyes, V. (2018). 'In-betweenners': Chinese students' experiences in China-Australia articulation programmes. *Scottish Educational Review, 50*(1), 36-55.

Dai, K. (2016). An investigation of Chinese postgraduate students' experiences on a data-visualised English writing feedback platform. In R. Bilof (Eds.), *IEEE International Conference on Educational Innovation through Technology Proceedings* (pp. 168-173).

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Dai, K. (2018). *The Pandora's Box of studying in transnational higher education: An exploration of Chinese students' learning experiences in China-Australia joint programmes.* Paper presented at the 11th Biennial Comparative Education Society of Asia, Siem Reap, Cambodia.

Dai, K., Matthews, K., & Wright, A. (2016). *Activity theory and transnational education: A comparative investigation of Chinese students' Internet-assisted learning experience in the China-Australia cross-cultural context.* Paper presented at the XVI World Congress of Comparative Education Societies, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China.

Dai, K. (2015). *An investigation of Chinese students' perceptions of blended learning strategies in a cross-cultural setting: A case study of a Chinese-Australian transnational programme.* Paper presented at the AARE-NZARE 2015 Conference, University of Notre Dame, Australia.

Dai, K. (2015). *The role of interactive data visualisation in English learning: A case study of Chinese undergraduate students' perceptions of a web-based data visualising English academic writing feedback platform.* Paper presented at the Third 21st Century Academic Forum, Harvard University, the United States.

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transnational higher education, articulation programmes, in-betweenness, in-between space, intercultural learning and adjustment, Chinese students, learning experiences

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Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables

List of Abbreviations used in the thesis

CBE	Cross-Border Education
CHC	Confucian Heritage Culture
CFCRS	Chinese Foreign Cooperatively Running Schools
CUHK	Chinese University of Hong Kong
ELT	Experiential Learning Theory
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GATE	Global Alliance for Transnational Education
GPA	Grade Point Average
HE	Higher Education
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MoE	Ministry of Education
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
PC	Personal Computer
PR	Permanent Residency
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
TNE	Transnational Education
TNHE	Transnational Higher Education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation
UQ	The University of Queensland
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Chapter 1:

Introduction: Critically examining the global phenomenon of transnational higher education (TNHE) in China

1.1 Introduction

With the rapid development of society, Chinese higher education (HE) is facing various historical challenges and opportunities to reform its structure. To engage in the increasing trend of globalisation and internationalisation of HE, many Chinese universities are actively cooperating with foreign partners to develop various types of articulated educational forms, which usually refers to transnational education (TNE). In tertiary education, it is known as transnational higher education (TNHE). Notably, many other terms (e.g. cross-border, offshore, or borderless) are sometimes used to indicate similar meanings as with TNE and they have been usually adopted in educational research and practices interchangeably (Knight, 2016). However, TNE has been commonly accepted and utilised as a popular term to describe the movement of educational services between countries in everyday research uses (Knight, 2016). Hence, by following the trend, this research will use TNHE as the representative concept to indicate articulation education in a general sense.

Considering the existing studies related to this field, in the past few decades research has broadly discussed the history, development, and potential directions of the internationalisation of Chinese HE and other Asian countries (e.g. Huang, 2003a, 2003b, 2008; He, 2016; He & Liu, 2018; Mok & Ong, 2014; R. Yang, 2008). Meanwhile, many researchers (e.g. Dunn & Wallace, 2006; Shuoshuoson, 2016; Levatino, 2017; Moufahim & Lim, 2015; Pyvis & Chapman, 2005; Wilkins, Butt, & Dengdengbi, 2017; H. Yang & Lesser, 2017; Ziguras, 2003, 2016) have also widely explored TNHE-related topics in and across other areas, such as Oceania, Europe, America and Middle East. However, there are limited studies focused on Chinese students' learning experiences in certain modes of TNHE, especially in articulated undergraduate 2+2 programmes, which is one of the

popular modes of joint education setting under the broad sense of TNHE. To make a contribution to the field of internationalisation of HE and TNHE research, this doctoral study aims to explore a group of Chinese students' lived learning experiences in their China-Australia 2+2 articulation programmes.

In this introductory chapter, the research background from the perspective of the development of TNHE is discussed to illustrate the general landscape of the study. Then, students' mobility issues under the trend of internationalisation are introduced from the perspectives of intercultural learning and adjustment. Meanwhile, my own learning story is briefly discussed, as it originally provoked me to explore the research field of TNHE, intercultural learning and adjustment from students' perspectives. After the introduction of the research background, the significance of this study and potential research problems are interpreted via a discussion of research gaps, aims and questions. Finally, the thesis structure is explicated chapter by chapter.

1.2 Research Background

1.2.1 Increasing cooperation in higher education between China and foreign countries.

With the rapid development of its economy in past decades, China is seeking effective ways to improve the quality and competitive standing of HE internationally. After joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001, China started to play an increasingly significant role in global engagement in various areas, for example, in the economy and education (Huang, 2003b). From a macro perspective, the irresistible trend of globalisation has had significant influences on the development of modern Chinese HE.

It is worth noting that globalisation is a contested concept (Hay, 2002), which may have various meanings in different fields, such as political science, cultural studies, sociology, economic research, and also education (Altbach, 2004; Appadurai, 2000; Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 2000; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). For instance, globalisation may represent a series of "flows" of multiple social, cultural, economic 'scapes' between and across national borders (Appadurai, 1996). Furthermore, as Altbach (2004) indicated, "globalisation in the 21st century is truly worldwide in reach – few places can elude contemporary trends, and innovations and practices seem to spread ever faster due to modern technology" (p. 5). The movement of these social elements around the world could lead to the constant (re)construction of "transnational diasporic networks" (Rizvi, 2005, p. 188).

Influenced by globalisation, the Chinese government actively reformed the education system in order to enhance the quality of Chinese HE (R. Yang, 2008).

The aim of the reforms is not only to foster more well-educated people who could make contributions to the sustainable development of the country, but also to increase international communications with other countries through education (Hou, Montgomery, & McDowell, 2014). From a micro level, benefits from the accelerated growth of the economy mean that increasing numbers of Chinese families indicate a strong desire to ensure their children are well-educated (Zhang & Tobias, 2015), which aims to improve their individual competitiveness in the labour market and expand their horizons. Such a massive demand for educational services also potentially stimulates the reform of the HE system (Huang, 2003b). To achieve the development of HE against the background of globalisation, the Chinese government has encouraged foreign universities to establish articulation education programmes or institutions in China, in a concerted attempt to internationalise Chinese HE.

As an important response to globalisation, Chinese HE is experiencing internationalisation. According to R. Yang (2016), the internationalisation of HE in China has a long history, since the Qing dynasty. However, due to the constant revolutions and social changes in Chinese society, the internationalisation of HE was facing various barriers. It was not until Deng Xiaoping's call for gearing Chinese education to the world in 1983, that the Chinese central government launched the students' study overseas project (R. Yang, 2016). However, in this early stage, although international communication with foreign countries was being developed, it was still without enough deep and wide engagement. After joining the WTO, as mentioned above, China faced more challenges and opportunities.

To foster and standardise international cooperation with foreign countries in education, the Chinese government enacted various policies. For example, the China State Council published the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools[1] in 2003 (Huang, 2008). It is considered as one of the most important policies for reforming and regulating the international cooperation between Chinese and foreign institutions (R. Yang, 2008). Following this policy, in 2004, the Ministry of Education (MoE) proposed another policy document, known as the Implementation Measures for Regulations of the People's Republic of China on

[1] The "Schools" mainly represent university as with American usage.

Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools. Based on the guidance of these policies, Chinese universities established multiple types of articulation with foreign partners. Such international articulation is well known as Chinese-foreign cooperatively running schools (CFCRS) and *"Zhong Wai He Zuo Ban Xue" (中外合作办学)* in Chinese, which is a response to the global trend of internationalisation of HE (Huang, 2014).

The CFCRS has become one of the most important parts of the Chinese HE system. Through establishing articulation education, both China and foreign nations could get various potential benefits, such as financial income, academic interactions and even cross-cultural communications (Huang, 2011; Knight, 2004). Specifically, students and lecturers become the significant intermediaries to conduct the learning and teaching activities through different types of articulations (de Wit, 2002), which are regarded as valuable ways to enhance the quality of Chinese HE (Mok, Han, Park, & Sorrell, 2016). However, practically, the quality issues in cross-system educational context are difficult to monitor and examine to some extent, because this involves many stakeholders who could have different features; for example, students may experience varied learning and teaching in cross-system settings (Knight, 2006).

Research has widely discussed the quality issues of articulation education in a cross-system context. As van Damme (2001) argued, the quality issues under the trend of internationalisation of HE are important and need to be carefully considered, as lack of quality could significantly influence the future development of articulation programmes. Quality issues related to TNHE have become an attractive area for researchers (e.g. Bannier, 2016; Han, 2017; Hou et al., 2014; Liu & Liu, 2016; Ziguras, 2016). As one of the major players in the field of TNHE, China has also conducted various strategies and enacted several policies to refine and to monitor the quality of articulations with foreign partners. For example, the Chinese government has started to reduce the speed of developing new programmes in order to emphasise that TNHE should focus on improving the quality of education, rather than become a pathway for making profits as a commodity (Hou et al., 2014).

Although the government realises the issues of quality in current TNHE, there are still many problems in practice. For example, R. Yang (2014, p. 156) indicated:

> While the central government approves or charters the establishment of joint education programmes in line with the existing legal frameworks and guidelines, a lack of consistent

> oversight after approval has left the responsibility for quality entirely in the hands of the dedicated teaching staff and programmes coordinators.

According to this statement, it is apparent that the quality of TNHE in the Chinese context reveals a complicated picture. It seems that there are many gaps between the government policy and the reactions of universities, programmes designers, and lecturers in running certain TNHE institutions and programmes. Furthermore, it is worth noting that various factors could influence the quality of TNHE. Different stakeholders may have different standards to evaluate quality. Existing research has suggested several approaches to monitor and/or enhance the quality of TNHE, for example, the establishment of quality monitoring and evaluating systems (Liu & Liu, 2016). Moreover, it is important to consider students' experiences in such a complex cross-system education setting, as they are one of the major players who deeply engage in learning and teaching practices (Mok & Ong, 2014; Pyvis & Chapman, 2004).

Considering Chinese students' experiences in CFCRS, it is necessary to note that they usually experience two and even multiple types of education during their learning in either undergraduate or postgraduate programmes. When students study in a programme that is created by Chinese and foreign institutions, they could often face cross-system differences in their learning processes. These differences could be either valuable for them to experience, or difficult for them to adjust to. Notably, Australia is one of the significant partners that establish various collaborations with China in TNHE (Dai, Lingard, & Reyes, 2018). It is important for Australian universities to carefully examine students' learning experiences (e.g. teaching, academic supports, and uses of technology) in Australia, which may reflect the quality of education and then influence the attraction of Australia as an overseas destination for potential international students (Zhang & Tobias, 2015). Therefore, it is significant for researchers and educators to reveal the actual learning experiences of Chinese students in cross-system education through focused research (Michelle & Dunn, 2008; Qin & Te, 2016).

More broadly speaking, it is significant for countries (e.g. Australia) that propose to attract more overseas students to have deep understandings of their actual learning experiences in a foreign context and then provide a high quality of education to satisfy students' demands (Zhang & Tobias, 2015). Based on the suggestions of these previous studies, the purpose of this doctoral dissertation is to explore Chinese students' authentic learning experiences in the context of international articulation

education, especially China-Australia articulation programmes, which could add further insights into the literature and provide detailed evidence to different stakeholders to better understand and gain an appreciation of this under-researched theme.

1.2.2 Students' mobility and adjustment in a cross-border context.

Mobility is one of the important and salient features of globalisation. According to Appadurai (1996), globalisation can be considered as a trend of dynamic movements of different social and cultural elements (e.g. economy, people, education, and technology) across different countries. Here Appadurai refers to multiple "scapes"; for example, finance scapes, idea scapes, ethno scapes, media scapes, that flow across national borders in disjunctive ways. With the rapid development of information and communication technology (ICT), information and resources could be moved to either physical place or virtual space rapidly (Appadurai, 1996; Urry, 2007). Under the influence of globalisation, mobility in education could refer to the movement of academic resources, lecturers, students, services and other related elements across different countries and regions, which motivates the development of cross-border HE (Varghese, 2008). The mobility of these elements increases the constant communications and interactions between different educational systems, cultures, and societies (Urry, 2007), which potentially promote knowledge production across different countries and areas (Park, 2018).

However, the concept of mobility is not just about transferring something between different places and contexts (Park, 2018). In contrast, it is worth noting that people may have many intentions and actions to achieve their proposed goals and aims in movement between different contexts, which could reveal their different capabilities to deal with cross-system issues. Such capability can be theoretically considered as human agency, which could be further divided into two sub-categories: "to do mentally" or "to do physically" (Park, 2018, p. 63). Based on my understanding, "to do mentally" may indicate people's intrinsic intentions of doing something. Then, "to do physically" can be considered as actions or performances in doing something. Practically, it is important to note that the "to do physically" usually coincides with "to do mentally" as intrinsic (mental) intentions and extrinsic (physical) performance could reflect each other (Park, 2018).

Under the increasing trend of mobility in a global context, educational practices (e.g. learning and teaching activities) in a cross-system setting could become more flexible and sophisticated. When

different institutions, people (e.g. students and lecturers), educational resources from different cultural and educational backgrounds work together, a series of issues related to cross-system cooperation could inevitably emerge in practice, for example, intercultural adjustment issues, even though each partner may design their articulation programmes carefully. In this process, the ways of dealing with intercultural differences could indicate different senses of agency and complicated interconnections between "to do mentally" and "to do physically".

Issues related to intercultural adjustment have been widely discussed in the field of educational research (e.g. Campbell & Li, 2007; Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2010; Kember, 2016a). Specifically, students' movements (mobility) across different educational systems, cultures, and societies have become an important research topic (Henze & Zhu, 2012), as their intercultural learning experiences provide evidence for educators, policymakers, and universities. These stakeholders usually have responsibilities to run and monitor the quality of their educational services, especially for articulation education. Due to the multiple types of articulation programmes (e.g. study aboard or branch campus) and different educational delivery approaches (e.g. physical or virtual), students' sense of intercultural adjustment may also be widely varied.

Previous research has fruitfully explored students' intercultural adjustment issues (e.g. Gill, 2007; Gu, 2016a; J. Zhu, 2016). On the one hand, many studies have focused on the intercultural adjustment issues of Chinese students' movement from China to another country, such as the United Kingdom (e.g. Gill, 2007; Gu, 2016a; Quan, He, & Sloan, 2016), the United States of America (e.g. Yan & Berliner, 2016), Australia (e.g. J. Wang & Ocean, 2016; Wong, Cooper, & Dellaportas, 2015), Canada (e.g. Guo & Guo, 2017), New Zealand (e.g. Campbell & Li, 2007), and Germany (e.g. J. Zhu, 2016). These research studies provide much empirical evidence about the complex stories of Chinese students' intercultural learning and adjustment in other countries or educational systems. Specifically, a significant proportion of these studies have suggested that many Chinese students were able to adjust to the new learning system and develop intercultural competencies, even though they usually faced several issues (e.g. language, social engagement, and educational differences) in this process.

On the other hand, many researchers have discussed issues in cross-cultural adjustment and developed theoretical models to conceptualise trajectories of adjustment. For instance, Lysgaand (1955) created the famous U-model to indicate the curve of adjustment to a new context. Based on

the U-model and the concept of cultural shock, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) developed a W-curve to extend the U-model. The W-curve shows that people usually experience five stages in the process of adjustment to a new context, including, "Honeymoon", "Culture Shock", "Initial Adjustment", "Mental Isolation", and "Acceptance and Integration", which will be further interpreted in Chapter 2. To refine these existing models, Adler (1975) critically proposed five stages of transnational adjustment, including contact, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy, and independence. However, these models seemed to ignore the dynamic changes of intercultural adjustment across the period of articulation programmes and in different learning sites.

To refine these previous models, Y. Kim (1988) proposed three stages of intercultural adjustment, which is stress-adaptation-development (or growth). More recently, Gill (2007) further confirmed and developed this three stages model to suggest that intercultural adjustment is a complicated process rather than a simply linear one. In her study, Gill (2007) suggested that many students usually changed their identities in the process of intercultural learning and they indicated different competencies to deal with cross-system differences. As a result, many students had multiple reflections about their senses of belonging after experiencing intercultural learning. According to the brief discussion above, it is evident that existing research provides rich and robust, practical and theoretical foundations to researchers who are in the field of intercultural learning and adjustment. However, there seems to be limited research that attempts to undertake in-depth investigations of students' experiences of intercultural learning and adjustment in cross-system articulation education.

Articulation education is theoretically delivered by two institutions from different countries with specific agreements. Clearly, the educational context of this mode of the provision is different when compared with other pathways. Traditionally, most Chinese students usually take four years for one Chinese university to complete their undergraduate study. If they propose to study abroad, they need to apply to foreign universities by themselves or via educational agents. If they obtain offers from foreign universities, they can study overseas at an advanced level, for example, Masters. In normal pathways, students can manage their steps and make choices flexibly depending on individual situations and plans. When they go overseas by themselves, they usually move to the new country as an individual student without belonging to an official group. In this case, they may need to individually face cross-system barriers in the process of adjustment to the new context.

Compared with the common student pathway, articulation programmes offer students opportunities to experience international education within their study as a compulsory process and as a member of official groups. Depending on multiple types of articulation, students could either study in China and a foreign country for certain years in each context (e.g. "1+1", "2+2", or "3+1") or fully experience overseas education ("4+0" or branch campus) in China (Hou et al., 2014). The number refers to the years that students need to study in Chinese and foreign institutions respectively. Due to the numerous settings of learning pathways in articulation programmes, students' learning experiences and their adjustment to new modes could be complex. In the research field of TNHE, although several studies have investigated related issues from students' perspectives (e.g. Lamberton & Ashton-Hay, 2015; Quan, Smailes, & Fraser, 2013; F. Wang, Clarke, & Yu, 2016), there is still limited research that focuses on and illustrates students' learning trajectories in articulation programmes. Specifically, limited studies have examined whether existing theoretical models of intercultural adjustment might adequately conceptualise students' learning journeys in articulation education (Ashton-Hay, Wignell, & Evans, 2016; Bovill, Jordan, & Watters, 2015; Kosmützky & Putty, 2016).

It becomes imperative therefore to explore students' learning experiences in such complex settings. Understanding students' experiences of such educational programmes could add further insights to the field of TNHE from both practical and theoretical perspectives. Furthermore, students' reflections could provide much more detailed stories and feedback to stakeholders as references for the future design, selection, operation, and management of related educational articulations based on effective and successful approaches. Student voices are important in this development and goal of improvement (Cook-Sather, 2006). Not only do several existing recent studies indicate this under-researched domain (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016; Qin & Te, 2016), but also my individual learning journey provoked my research interests in this particular field. I was a former student in a China-Australia articulation programme. My mobility as an international student in such a programme manifested various concerns and issues, which will be an important supplementary intellectual and empirical resource for me in researching other students' experiences in China-Australia articulation programmes.

1.2.3 My individual experience as a former 2+2 student.

One of the primary motivations for conducting this study predominantly stems from my own educational background and experience. In 2007, I was admitted to a China-Australia 2+2 programme to start my undergraduate study at a leading Chinese institution in the field of Art and Design. When I started my programme, I was not clear about what my study would be in this particular 2+2 setting, as this kind of learning pathway was not very popular at that time. Therefore, limited information about this educational setting was available for me to obtain and examine before selecting it as my learning pathway. However, one thing was obvious, I would be going to Australia after two years of study in China.

During the first two years, I mainly focused on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test, as a minimum score of overall 6 or above on the test was a compulsory requirement for transferring to the Australian element of the programme. For other courses, I just learned them and ensured that I passed the exams at the end of each semester. Meanwhile, many lecturers from Australia visited the Chinese university to introduce the Australian university. Although such activities let me briefly gain information about my further future study and life in Australia, the reality was different. As a Chinese traditional idiom suggests, it is better to see once than to hear a hundred times, which is *"Er Ting Wei Xu, Yan Jian Wei Shi" (耳听为虚，眼见为实)* in Chinese.

After two years of study in China, in 2009 I transferred to an Australian university to conduct the last two years of my degree study. I remembered that when I started my learning in Australia, there were many differences in learning compared with my previous Chinese experiences. Even though I passed IELTS with average 6 in each subject (speaking, writing, reading, and listening), I still found that it was difficult to adapt to the new learning environment because of many problems such as language issues, different teaching and learning styles, and the use of Internet-based technologies. When I communicated with other peers, I noticed that most of them also found it difficult to adapt to such a different study environment, especially in the initial stage.

After studying in Australia for approximately one year, I felt that I could adjust to this context because I became familiar with the teaching and learning approaches and my language became better than before. However, I realised that many issues emerged from this development and change.

Specifically, as the 2+2 programme was operated by two universities, the impression I had was that I did not get the necessary support in the transition. Notably, the course content that I learned from China was not consistent with the Australian context. I needed to learn detailed knowledge as a beginner in Australia. For example, I remember that there were several courses related to web design in the Australia stage. These courses required students to have a fundamental knowledge of programming language (e.g. HTML, CSS, and JavaScript). However, when I was in China, my programme did not include related courses about these programming skills. In the Australia classroom, lecturers who taught these courses seemed to not know the 2+2 students' situations. They usually did not teach such basic knowledge again and directly introduced advanced content, which meant it was challenging for me and other 2+2 peers to follow the teaching. Even though I tried to ask more questions from lecturers to help me deal with my learning problems, it was still challenging for me to learn discipline knowledge in depth with limited support from lecturers who were not able to teach fundamental knowledge for these 2+2 students. To some extent, such cross-system barriers made it difficult for me and others to engage in the new learning context with positive attitudes.

Although I completed my study and obtained an average mark of Distinction, I still felt that this educational mode positioned many students in awkward situations. This is because we faced many problems in the process of transition and adjustment to the new context without being provided with enough support. This seemed to be the experience of many of my fellow students in articulation programmes. However, according to my experience, both Chinese and Australian universities did not formally ask 2+2 students about any learning issues in these different academic settings. It seemed almost as if these students were merely forgotten and their specific needs not canvassed, considered or met.

When I considered my research topic for my doctorate, my personal experience of articulation programme and the issues it raised suggested a research topic for me. I felt it was necessary to research the experiences of students in such programmes, so as to gain insights that would help in understanding their experiences, possibly as a way to enhance the quality of such programmes and improve the articulation between the two parts of the programme, and also improve delivery of such programmes. More academically and as a researcher, I also hoped that such research would contribute to the literature on internationalisation of HE and TNHE, particularly for the Chinese context. I also firmly believe that students' voices must be heard in relation to the improvement of design and

delivery of articulation programmes. Furthermore, it is essential for universities, educators, and policymakers to hear and listen to the voices of such students, whose experiences could help further develop and enhance TNHE. Student voices are also one way of ascertaining quality in respect of such programmes.

Based on the existing literature and my own learning experiences outlined above, I decided to explore Chinese students' learning experiences in China-Australia 2+2 articulation programmes. More detailed discussion about the types of Chinese articulation, intercultural adjustment issues, and my research rationale will be systematically introduced in Chapter 2 through a literature review.

1.3 Significance and Research Gaps

The significance of this study is based on three identified research gaps in the related literature. First, an increasing number of research studies have focused on investigating issues in the field of TNHE, especially in the Chinese and Australian contexts (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016). However, several researchers (e.g. Qin & Te, 2016; T. Wang, 2016b) suggested that limited studies have explored Chinese students' learning experiences in such cooperative education modes. Although there are many different types of TNHE, such as 2+2 or other similar modes, it is difficult to research such programmes in their entirety because of the four-year time frame and different academic settings (Hou, 2011). While this doctoral research focuses on China-Australia articulation programmes, the quality of TNHE is a relevant world-wide issue and one demanding further research (Bannier, 2016; Zhao, 2017).

This study aims to comprehensively illustrate a group of Chinese students' lived learning trajectories by analysing their experiences as learners in 2+2 programmes. The research also proposes to add practical insights into the field of TNHE, particularly for the Chinese and Australian contexts. As Cook-Sather (2006) suggested, hearing students' voices is valuable and essential for people to review what actually happens for learners when they study in specific programmes and settings.

Second, based on the first research gap, it is worth noting that the 2+2 setting allows students to physically move to another country in the last two years of undergraduate study. Therefore, intercultural learning spontaneously happens in these students' cross-system and cross-national learning processes. However, these students' intercultural adjustments in the particular 2+2 mode are

under-researched. Although previous research has widely discussed students' intercultural adjustment issues from different perspectives and also developed various theoretical models to theorise this process (e.g. Gill, 2007; Gu & Maley, 2008; Gudykunst, 1988; Hou, 2011), limited studies have examined whether or not the 2+2 students experienced similar intercultural adjustment aligned with these previous findings. To fill this research gap, this study proposes to make sense of intercultural adjustments of Chinese students' lived learning experiences in the 2+2 setting.

Third, many existing research studies have investigated Chinese students' learning experiences in various types of TNHE from different perspectives. For instance, some lecturers (e.g. Bovill et al., 2015; Ng & Nyland, 2016) explored teaching practices in articulation programmes from lecturers' perspectives. Furthermore, many researchers (e.g He, 2016; Mok & Han, 2016; Montgomery, 2016) have investigated the development of articulation education in China from the researchers' perspective as the third party. However, limited research has been conducted from the perspective of students. Furthermore, my personal experience in a 2+2 programme adds additional empirical data to the study. As mentioned above, I was a former 2+2 student who could be considered an insider in this particular setting. At the same time, I am an outsider researcher who wanted to explore other students' experiences in such an educational setting. As I completed my programme approximately five years ago, I am not familiar with the current situation. Therefore, I wish to position myself in between these different roles in this study in order to critically reflect on my own experiences, which could be regarded as a way of understanding students' learning journeys in current 2+2 settings. In contrast to other researchers that have investigated TNHE issues as outsiders in relation to students' perspectives, I attempted to adopt a reflexive-narrative to analyse and reveal students' cross-system learning experiences via the methodological position of being simultaneously an insider and outsider researcher.

1.4 Research Aims and Questions

Set against identified research gaps, this study focuses on exploring Chinese students' learning experiences in China-Australian articulation programmes. Specifically, students in 2+2 settings will be the significant research participants as they have both Chinese and Australian learning experiences and have encountered intercultural learning in the move from China to Australia.

First, I planned to investigate students' learning processes in such a cross-system 2+2 setting. This focus aims to understand what kinds of changes that students experienced and reflected upon during their 2+2 programme learning processes. Second, I wished to reveal the actual teaching and learning practices in particular 2+2 programmes. As students' experiences could be considered as one of the direct reflections on the quality of such programmes, it was necessary to explore how the teaching and learning practices in 2+2 programmes shaped students' intercultural learning activities and influenced their own understandings of such educational programmes and as learners in this setting. Based on these research aims, I developed three research questions, including one overarching and two sub-questions, which helped narrow my research direction into specific focuses.

The overarching research question is:

- "How do Chinese students experience learning in China-Australia 2+2 programmes?"

The sub-questions are:

- "How do Chinese students make sense of themselves as 2+2 learners, that is, make sense of their agency, identity, and belonging?"
- "What factors may have impacted on the students' intercultural learning experiences?"

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

The primary aim of Chapter 1 has been to explicate why this study is essential. To achieve this goal, I have discussed the research background from the perspectives of globalisation and internationalisation of HE, my own learning experiences in a 2+2 programme, and in respect of the concept of intercultural adjustment. The research problems, the significance of this study, research aims and questions have also been presented. In what follows, I provide an overview of each chapter.

In Chapter 2, a detailed literature review will be provided to establish the rationale of this study. The aim of this chapter is to identify what has been known in research fields related to this current study and then to critically establish my research rationale. Based on the introduction to Chapter 1, three significant aspects will be discussed in this literature review. First, existing studies about the development of TNHE in the Chinese context will be introduced. This aims to provide

evidence to support the significance of exploring and understanding students' learning and adjustment experiences, an under-researched area.

Second, research studies about intercultural adjustment will be discussed from both practical and theoretical perspectives. Research related to Chinese students' cross-system learning adjustments will be analysed to demonstrate the research gap in relation to students' intercultural adjustments in particular 2+2 educational contexts. Selected existing theoretical frameworks that are useful and productive to conceptualise the processes of intercultural adjustment will be critically discussed. The literature on factors that might have influenced students' intercultural adjustment will also be analysed. Finally, research methods that have been adopted in investigating Chinese students' intercultural adjustment will be explored, as I wish to make methodological contributions by adopting a reflexive-narrative approach to analyse and present my research findings.

In Chapter 3, I will introduce the research methodology. This chapter aims to explicate how I explored the proposed research questions and what data I collected and how and what analysis was carried out. I will start by introducing why social constructivism is adopted as the research paradigm, which aims to explicate my philosophical position in doing this study. Then I will explain why qualitative inquiry is adopted as the dominant research methodology. In the subsequent sections, research methods, sites, participants will be described respectively. After introducing the above information, a detailed discussion of data collection and analysis will be provided. Meanwhile, my position as both insider and outsider of the study in data collection and analysis will be critically discussed to highlight my methodological contributions. Finally, ethical considerations, trustworthiness and limitations of the methodology will be introduced to conclude the chapter. From Chapter 4 to Chapter 5, research findings will be reported, aiming to provide a holistic analysis of collected data to address the framing research questions.

In Chapter 4, I focus on answering the first sub-question (How do Chinese students make sense of themselves as 2+2 learners, that is, make sense of their agency, identity, and belonging?). This chapter explores how research participants experienced learning in their 2+2 programmes. To answer this question, I report research participants' narratives of learning trajectories in detail, interspersed with my own critical reflexivity. Specifically, this chapter examines the changes in their experiences in relation to their sense of agency, identity, and belonging across 2+2 programmes. Their

learning experiences are analysed following the students' chronological move from China to Australia.

Chapter 5 addresses the second sub-research question (What factors may have impacted on the students' intercultural learning experiences?). This chapter illustrates the key factors that play important roles in students' learning processes in 2+2 programmes. In this chapter, I also theorise the contours of the learning space created by the 2+2 setting that seems to be a site where there are constant (re)constructions of students' sense of agency, identity, and belonging in an intercultural context.

Drawing the thesis to a close, Chapter 6 interprets and theorises the potential meanings of the key research findings. In this concluding chapter, I also provide a summative response to the central research question based on the data analysis and findings provided in Chapters 4 and 5. Then, significant findings will be discussed by comparing these with existing research studies from both practical and theoretical perspectives. Finally, contributions, implications, shortcomings, and future research suggestions will be critically discussed to conclude this thesis.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has set up the backdrop to and rationale for this research study. The research problem, which is that limited numbers of existing studies have explored Chinese students' learning experiences in China-Australia 2+2 articulation programmes, was highlighted. Furthermore, the significance of this study and research gaps in the literature were explored. Then, the critical research aim, to explore how Chinese students experience learning in their 2+2 articulation programmes, was proposed with three research questions, comprising one central question and two sub-questions. Finally, the structure of this thesis was outlined.

As the research background indicated above, with the growing trend of globalisation (e.g. the "flows" of people, technology, economy, and many other elements) and internationalisation of HE, China began to actively engage in international communication and cooperation. Specifically, in response to these trends, increasing numbers of Chinese universities established various types of articulation programmes with foreign partners, which could enhance the quality of education in China and improve the competitiveness of HE in the world. With the constant development of articulation

education in China, many Chinese students were able to select different modes of articulation programmes as their learning pathways in HE.

However, many existing studies related to TNHE and intercultural learning did not focus on investigating Chinese students' lived learning experiences in articulation programmes (e.g. the 2+2 mode). As students are one of the major stakeholders in these programmes, their voices need to be heard to obtain a fuller understanding of how the programmes work and how effective they are. Student voices can contribute to improvements in the design and delivery of these programmes. Based on students' actual experiences, universities, educators, and policymakers could further refine articulation programmes to better fulfil students' requirements. This research seeks to contribute in these areas. The next chapter will provide a critical literature review on key concepts and studies related to TNHE, Chinese students' learning, and intercultural learning and adjustment, which aims to illustrate the theoretical foundation of this study and the research literature in which it is located.

Chapter 2:

Literature Review: Integrating TNHE and intercultural learning space

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a review of key literature related to the proposed study in order to reveal potential research gaps in the field of transnational higher education (TNHE). First, this review starts with exploring the research background from the perspective of globalisation and internationalisation of HE, which are considered as important motivators for the development of TNHE. More specifically, the response to these trends, which is known as Chinese-foreign cooperatively running schools (CFCRS) in the Chinese context, will be discussed in detail from the following aspects: brief history of CFCRS, current situation of CFCRS, quality issues of CFCRS, current studies about learning related issues in CFCRS and methodological gaps in exploring students' learning experiences in CFCRS.

In the second part, research related to learning in different cultural contexts will be reviewed from Chinese students' perspectives by starting with a discussion of key terms in this field (e.g. cross-cultural, intercultural, adjustment, and adaptation). Then, national cultural differences based on Hofstede's (1980, 1984, 1986, 2001) theories will be critically discussed to identify different features of different regions, especially so-called western and eastern countries. Based on this macro-level analysis of cultural differences between different countries, this study will further review Chinese students' learning features in different cultural contexts. Their learning features will be analysed by comparing views of Chinese learners, including stereotypes as well as fresh perspectives. Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) will also be considered in order to highlight the complex picture of Chinese students' features in cross-system and cross-national settings.

In the last section, the key theoretical concepts about intercultural learning and adjustment will be discussed. Specifically, the critical review starts with exploring the concept of shocks in cross-

cultural contexts, which are considered as barriers to students' intercultural learning and adjustment. Then, theoretical frameworks important for illustrating the trajectory of intercultural learning and adjustments will be critically reviewed, for example, the stress-adaptation-growth model (Y. Kim, 1988, 2001) and Chinese students' transformative learning framework (Gill, 2007). Finally, this section concludes with a discussion of the debates about learning space from intercultural and third space perspectives (Bhabha, 1994).

In the chapter summary, key research gaps will be concisely recapped to highlight the significance of this doctoral research study.

2.2 Globalisation and Internationalisation of Higher Education

2.2.1 The relationship between globalisation and internationalisation of higher education.

The globalisation and internationalisation of higher education (HE) has close connections. The concept of globalisation is a complicated term and severe to be precisely defined (Dale & Robertson, 2002), which has been critically discussed by scholars (e.g. Appadurai, 2000; Held et al., 2000; Knight, 1997; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). For example, Knight (1997) argued that globalisation means "the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, ideas … across borders" (p. 6). This definition indicates that globalisation interweaves different elements of the world, with challenges to the traditional working of the nation-state. From the perspective of social politics, Held et al., (2000, p. 15) defined it as:

> Globalisation can usefully be conceived as a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions, generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and power.

To summarise the core of this concept, they suggested that "globalisation can be thought of as growth in the breadth, intensity, speed and impact of worldwide interconnectedness" (Held et al., 2000, p. 15). Being similar with Knight's (1997) understanding as shown above, to further theorise the concept of globalisation, Appadurai (2000) suggested that it is about "flows and disjunctures" across national boundaries (p. 5). Specifically, flows could mean the constant cross-boundary movements of different social elements, such as "ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques" (Appadurai, 2000, p. 5). He calls these cross-national flows

"scapes". The disjunctures could mean the contradictions and problems emerged from the cross-boundary movements of various social elements between different countries, ideologies, cultures, and societies because each region may have unique features that could not be changed or influenced by others (Appadurai, 2000). It is apparent that globalisation could be a double-edged sword that not only has positive influences on cross-boundary interactions, but also brings issues to different countries to some extent.

Furthermore, Altbach and Knight (2007) shared their views about the possible results of globalisation on the development of the world society. Altbach and Knight (2007, p. 291) argued that

> The results of globalisation include the integration of research, the use of English as the lingua franca for scientific communication, the growing international labour market for scholars and scientists, the growth of communications firms and of multi-national and technology publishing, and the use of information technology (IT).

According to these results, it seems that globalisation does not only refer to shifts and flows of social, capital, cultural, economic elements across borders, but also indicate a potential process of (re)shaping contemporary societies, cultures, ideologies, which could be connected tightly, especially under the rapid development of technologies that are also bearers of globalisation (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

To react to these complex changes associated with globalisation, different countries have different strategies in respect to globalisation as each country has particular situations (Knight, 1997). Specifically, HE is also undoubtedly influenced by globalisation. Altbach and Knight (2007) suggested that globalisation pushes HE into deeper international engagement under the "the economic, political, and societal forces" (p. 290). In doing so, HE becomes internationalised.

Along with the growing international interactions, the trend of internationalisation of HE is generated. As Knight (1997) claimed, "Internationalisation of higher education is one of the ways a country responds to the impact of globalisation yet, at the same time respects the individuality of the nation" (p. 6). Later, she further indicated that "Internationalisation is changing the world of higher education, and globalisation is changing the world of internationalisation" (Knight, 2004, p. 5).

According to the above explanations, it is apparent that globalisation could be regarded as an activator or precipitator of internationalisation of HE. Meanwhile, internationalisation of HE could be a reaction to globalisation. To explicitly clarify the intertwined relationships between these concepts in HE, Altbach and Knight (2007) advocated that "internationalisation includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions – and even individuals – to cope with the global academic environment" (p. 290). Influenced by the growing trend of globalisation "beginning in the mid-1980s internationalisation of higher education, interpreted in the broadest sense, started to increase in importance, scope, and volume" (Knight, 2006, p. 352).

Internationalisation in the context of HE is complicated and thus difficult to define. As Knight (2006, p. 16) suggested, it is difficult to use a "simple, unique or all-encompassing definition" to interpret the meaning of internationalisation in higher education. However, it is obvious that the internationalisation could be considered as an extension of "international". As M. Bennett (2010) advocated, the concept of international in education could refer to "the movement of students, faculty, researchers, and other academics across national borders" (p. 419). This concept could echo one of most cited definitions of internationalisation of HE proposed by Knight (1993) who identified that it is a "process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of a university or college" (p. 21).

Based on these explanations, it is evident that the internationalisation of HE is a systematic process that is conducted by different actors, institutions, and countries under the trend of globalisation. As Knight (1997) identified, "internationalisation is not only oriented to countries or nation states but also includes the different cultural/ethnic groups within a country" (p. 8). During this process, different educational systems and sociocultural elements are continually interacting with each other, creating a cross-cultural context. Therefore, the trend of internationalisation of HE occurs along with multiple intercultural communications.

Under the trend of globalisation, HE has been involved in "a global business engaging in marketing strategies to sell their knowledge-based products, attract foreign students, and establish international branches" (Spring, 2009, p. 100). To implement the internationalisation of HE, an increasing number of universities have actively engaged in international collaboration.

2.2.2 Response to the internationalisation of higher education: The development of TNHE.

With the rapid development of the global economy and information and communication technology (ICT), especially the Internet, different cultures, societies and countries have more opportunities to become connected. Such close connections become an essential factor that promotes more in-depth communications in the field of education. Many international articulation programmes have been adopted in modern HE. With the growing trend of globalisation and internationalisation, HE has been widely exported and imported between many developing and developed countries.

In this case, transnational education (TNE) is proposed to conceptualise such a phenomenon. At the tertiary level, as mentioned in Chapter 1, it is also known as transnational higher education (TNHE) (Huang, 2003b). In the 21st century, TNHE has become a significant approach for achieving educational mobility of academics, students, and resources across the world (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). However, due to various barriers in the early stage (e.g. legal system differences), the import/export of education was not conducted very well until the outcomes of the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations from 1983 to 1993 were put in place (Hou et al., 2014; van der Wende, 2003).

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), one of the important outcomes of the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations, was enacted and further implemented in January 1995. According to Ziguras (2003), "GATS is a multilateral agreement through which WTO members commit to volunteer liberalisation of trade in services, including education" (p. 89). Under the policy of GATS, education has been regarded as one type of services to be traded worldwide. For instance, many countries in Asia and Latin America are actively "buying" educational services from developed countries, for example, the United State (the USA), the United Kingdom (the UK), Australia or European countries (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

With the rapid development of TNE, scholars (e.g. Knight, 2016) realised that it is necessary to clarify the definition and meaning of TNE (or TNHE) and other similar concepts. Notably, TNHE also refers to cross-border education (CBE), offshore, or borderless education (Abe & Wiseman, 1983; Huang, 2003b; Knight, 2005; R. Yang, 2008). Practically, TNHE and CBE are widely adopted in research, even though these terminologies can be used interchangeably but they have different focuses (Knight, 2016).

TNHE and CBE have been widely defined by different professional organisations and scholars. For example, the Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE), defined TNHE as the following statement (as cited in Heffernan & Poole, 2005, p. 224):

> Any teaching or learning activity in which the students are in a different country (the host countries) to that in which the institution providing the education is based (the home countries). This situation requires that national boundaries be crossed by information about the education, and by staff and/or education material (whether the information and education, and the materials travel by mail, computer network, radio or television broadcast or other means).

Furthermore, according to Mok and Han (2016), the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2001 concisely defined TNHE as "all types of higher education study where the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based" (p. 20). For the concept of CBE, Knight (2007) suggested that the CBE refers to "the movement of people, programmes, providers, curricula, projects, and services across national or regional jurisdictional borders" (p. 24).

According to these definitions of TNHE and CBE, it is apparent that they have many similarities and also different focuses. On the one hand, they emphasise the movement of people and educational resources, which allows them to be adopted interchangeably (Knight, 2007). On the other hand, TNHE seems to focus on the mobility of educational provision in different locations (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016), but CBE concentrates on the policy and regulations issues of jurisdictional borders in international cooperation (Knight, 2007). In this study, TNHE was adopted as the key term, as this study aimed to explore students' learning experiences in a cross-system and cross-national setting. Although policy issues will be briefly discussed, these were not the primary focus of this study. Hence, the concept of cross-border education is not used in this study.

Based on the above definitions, it is evident that cross-country (or border) is a distinct characteristic of TNHE. This point could suggest that educational activities in TNHE should be conducted between different countries. Second, educational resources and people move from one country to another through various approaches. This feature could indicate that many elements and approaches are involved in the transnational teaching and learning activities. The movements of

educational resources and people between different countries are a fundamental characteristic of TNHE. According to the definition above, TNHE can be regarded as a broad concept that includes many interdisciplinary subfields. It combines study with various elements, such as different countries, people and ICTs.

Along with the extensive development of TNHE around the world, it has been established via various modes. As the discussions of the definitions above suggest, TNHE refers to multiple elements of HE that move internationally, which generates various types of TNHE, such as branch campus, franchises, twinning, and distance education programmes (Huang, 2003b). However, Knight (2016) suggested that it is necessary to clearly identify different types of TNHE as confusion and misunderstanding of these terminologies exist in the research literature.

Based on Knight's (2016) framework, different educational modes reflected the concept of TNE could be sorted into two types, notably, collaborative or independent provisions. Precisely, the collaborative mode consists mainly of twinning, corporate programmes, or other types of articulation programmes (e.g. joint, double or multiple degree programmes) between local and foreign partners. Notably, such articulation programmes may award students one or more degrees depending on individual agreements and policies (Knight, 2016). However, this study does not focus on investigating such policy-related aspects but only concentrate on students' learning experiences in their articulation programmes. Hence, in this study, the concept of articulation is considered as a general term to represent a research context that refers to the cooperation between universities in different nations in designing and running educational programmes of a 2+2 kind. The strongest meaning of articulation in respect of such programmes would refer to joint design and thoughtfulness about how the two parts of the programme worked together. In contrast, the independent mode means that foreign universities offer education without cooperating with local partners, for example, creating a branch campus or instigating online learning (Knight, 2016). In this study, the focus will be on the collaborative provision, especially the study abroad via articulation programmes. Such programmes involving student mobility across nations and systems are the main mode of collaborative TNHE in the Chinese context (Mok & Ong, 2014).

In the field of TNHE-related research, numerous researchers have investigated various topics. Notably, here many researchers have investigated TNHE from the macro perspectives of globalisation,

internationalisation across countries, governments and policies, and institutions (e.g. Altbach, 2004; Altbach & Knight, 2007; de Wit, 2002; Jokila, 2015; Knight, 1997, 2006; Naidoo, 2009; Teichler, 2009; van Damme, 2001; van der Wende, 2003; Ziguras & McBurnie, 2011). In contrast, some scholars have concentrated on examining micro aspects, such as students' motivation, intercultural adjustment, and perceptions of transnational programmes (e.g. Djerasimovic, 2014; Heffernan, Morrison, Basu, & Sweeney, 2010; Hou & McDowell, 2013; Lamberton & Ashton-Hay, 2015; Tian & Martin, 2014; H. Yang & Lesser, 2017; Yu, 2014). According to these different directions and topics, it seems that TNHE has become a favorite field in educational research (Heffernan et al., 2010).

Moreover, as mentioned above, the educational services are usually exported by various developed countries to developing areas (Altbach & Knight, 2007). As one of the major countries that have imported "foreign" education, China is encouraging and experiencing the reform of HE in order to actively and genuinely engage with the trend of globalisation and internationalisation. In this study, transnational education and programmes in the Chinese context were chosen as the core research focus. In the next section, the development of TNHE in the Chinese context will be reviewed to further narrow down the research focus.

2.2.3 Internationalisation of higher education in China: Chinese-foreign cooperatively running schools (CFCRS).

Many researchers have widely investigated TNHE in Chinese HE system (e.g. Fang, 2012; Y. Feng, 2013; Gao, Feng, & Henderson, 2012; Han, 2017; He, 2016; Hou et al., 2014; Huang, 2003b, 2014; S. Li & Wang, 2009; Mok & Ong, 2014; Mok & Xu, 2008; Montgomery, 2016; Qin & Te, 2016; F. Wang et al., 2016; T. Wang, 2016b; R. Yang, 2008). For instance, Huang (2003a, 2003b) systematically analysed the growth and development of TNHE in China. His studies not only reviewed the history of TNHE in China, but also pinpointed its features from multiple perspectives such as programme settings, national policies and geographical destinations. Similarly, R. Yang (2008) investigated further details of TNHE, including majors of transnational programmes, the overseas partnership, and cultural appropriateness. Additionally, S. Li and Wang (2009) generally reviewed the development of the transnational programme in China and canvassed potential problems from the perspective of quality assurance. More recently, Han (2017) critically examined the challenge and benefits of TNHE in the Chinese context. The increasing trend of researching issues in

TNHE indicates that it has become an important component of Chinese HE and also a significant research topic (Xue, 2016).

In the Chinese context, as mentioned above, TNHE is called "*Zhong Wai He Zuo Ban Xue*" *(中外合作办学)* or CFCRS. To explicitly demonstrate the meaning of CFCRS, Hou et al. (2014, p. 308) suggested that:

> "Running schools" is the English translation of Chinese "*Ban Xue*" in the government regulation. It refers to the phenomenon that Chinese universities and foreign universities cooperate to set up programmes or institutions to recruit Chinese students.

TNHE emerged in China between 1978 and the mid-1980s, especially after enacting the Open Door Policy of Deng Xiaoping (Hou, Montgomery, & McDowell, 2011; Huang, 2011). However, the development of TNHE in this initial stage was limited. Meanwhile, related policies and regulations were being constructed. Until joining the WTO in 2001, China started to deeply engage in the trend of internationalisation of HE by following the agreement of GATS (Mok & Ong, 2014). As Lin and Liu (2007b) revealed, joining the WTO and conducting GATS can be considered as one of the significant motivations underpinning the development of TNHE in China. Against this background, not only does China seek opportunities to join the international platform, but foreign countries also wish to obtain benefits via exporting their educational services to China. Knight (2004) suggested that gaining financial benefits is one of the primary motivations for foreign universities to cooperatively run TNHE via their developing partners.

Furthermore, Lin and Liu (2007b) argued that along with the increasing number of students who can study in HE, the demand for the high quality of education is also required. In doing so, it potentially creates a giant market for both Chinese and foreign universities to cooperatively offer educational services that aim to fulfil the increasing demand for HE and to refine the structure of Chinese HE system (Lin & Liu, 2007b). Such factors could be regarded as an academic rationale for promoting the internationalisation of HE as the articulations between different countries motivate and facilitate the communications of academics, educational resources, and students (Knight, 2004).

To conduct CFCRS, Chinese universities mainly have four modes that have different legal positions in the Chinese HE system. Generally, the legal position refers to whether the CFCRS has

"independent" or "non-independent" legal status (Lin & Liu, 2007a, p. 3). The independent legal status of CFCRS usually refers to independent institutions (e.g. the University of Nottingham Ningbo China) (Lin & Liu, 2007a). In contrast, a non-independent legal status usually means attached (or second tier) colleges and CFCRS articulation programmes (M. Hu & Willis, 2017). The affiliated colleges are usually based in a Chinese university as an academic department, for example, Sydney Institute of Language & Commerce of Shanghai (Lin & Liu, 2007a).

For the CFCRS articulation programmes, they are usually named "*Zhong Wai He Zuo Ban Xue Xiang Mu*" *(中外合作办学项目)* in Chinese. They are usually run by Chinese and foreign universities in specific majors. Notably, such programmes are designed as "1+1", "2+2", "3+1", or "4+0" modes. In the first three models, students usually need to study in China for a couple of years and then transfer to a foreign university to complete the whole programme. Specifically, "2+2" and "3+1" are usually conducted at the undergraduate level but "1+1" usually happens in postgraduate study. The "4+0" is a particular case for the undergraduate study as students fully complete their programmes in China via learning contents offered by foreign partners without students actually physically studying overseas. Students may obtain their degrees from both Chinese and foreign universities depending on programme policy. According to Lin (2016), the Chinese government has approved about 2,400 CFCRS institutions and programmes, which are mainly run by higher education institutions. Specifically, the number of programmes at the undergraduate level is higher than the postgraduate stage due to various issues such as supervision, funding and timelines, and higher requirements for recruitment than undergraduate study (Gao et al., 2012).

Regarding learning in the CFCRS articulation programmes, students usually have opportunities to learn knowledge based on the combination of Chinese and foreign contents. Practically, CFCRS articulation programmes have become a favorite mode for many Chinese students to experience both Chinese and "foreign" education (Gao et al., 2012). In this study, CFCRS articulation programmes, especially the 2+2 model, are the primary research focus as, in the current landscape of CFCRS, such programmes play a dominant role compared with other types (Mok & Ong, 2014). Although such programmes are popular, however, the development of them still manifests several issues.

The academic disciplines and subjects of articulation programmes are abundant but uneven. Hou et al. (2014) suggested that the largest group of subjects is business and management related areas, such as accounting, marketing and business administration. Their findings resonate with R. Yang's (2008) research finding that 61% of articulation programmes focus on business-related subjects. Other popular disciplines and subjects include foreign languages, engineering, information technology, economy, arts and education (Hou et al., 2014). A large number of programmes in business and management related fields reflect the higher requirements of well-educated human resources under the background of the growing development of the Chinese economy. Notably, after joining the WTO, many Chinese companies started to do international business. The increasing demands for international business graduates stimulate the establishment of business-related programmes in universities.

The geographic distribution of articulation programmes in mainland China is imbalanced. R. Yang (2008) reported that metropolises (e.g. Beijing and Shanghai) and eastern economic developed prthe ovinces (e.g. Shandong, Jiangsu, Z tohejiang, Fujian and Guangdong) host most of the CFCRS programmes. Particularly, Heilongjiang in northeast China has approximately 200 programmes, which is the most substantial number compared with all the other provinces. The clustering of transnational programmes in economically developed regions indicates that the development of transnational education is affected by local financial situations and the demand for multicultural communications (Gao et al., 2012). The northeast coastal provinces have benefited from the rapid development of the economy. Hence, growing numbers of northeast coastal residents are able to afford to support their children to study abroad. Therefore, universities set up many CFCRS programmes in order to satisfy the increasing requirements of advanced higher education and demand for international educational experiences. Considering international partnerships, the geographic distribution is also uneven.

The international partnerships of articulation programmes are mainly hosted in highly economically-developed English speaking countries (Hou et al., 2014), even though foreign partners come from "more than 30 countries and regions" (Lin, 2016, p. 229). The top three countries are the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. Out of the many CFCRS programmes from different countries offered to Chinese university students, approximately more than 50% of their preferences fall within the ones offered by the three countries mentioned above. Notably, these

countries also dominate the global education market with approximately 44% share of international students (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). The CFCRS programmes offered by these countries occupy the significant preferences chosen by Chinese university students.

According to the above review by TNHE and CFCRS in the Chinese context, it is apparent that the landscape of CFCRS is complicated, which ensures that the quality of CFCRS remains a problematic issue. Although many studies have systematically analysed the CFCRS in China from a macro level (e.g. policy, history, and existing situation), it is also essential to further explore more practical issues in running such education articulation programmes from a micro perspective, for example, focusing on students' experiences. Students can be considered as the "end users" of CFCRS programmes. Their reflections could reveal various real stories and issues about learning in CFCRS programmes. Their voices regarding the cross-system and cross-national educational settings could indicate some quality issues of CFCRS programmes. Meanwhile, due to the numbers and variety of CFCRS programmesthe , students' learning experiences will be varied and as such, research focusing on student voices might very well illustrate varying accounts of the experiences of such students in these articulation programmes.

2.2.4 Quality issues with CFCRS.

The quality of TNHE set against the backdrop of globalisation and internationalisation has become a significant issue in cooperatively running schools and programmes. According to van der Wende (2003), M. Hu and Willis (2017), quality assurance is an essential issue for TNHE. Specifically, one of the principal aims of running CFCRS is to improve the quality of Chinese HE and to offer more opportunities for Chinese students to experience high quality higher education (Mok & Han, 2016). Hence, even though quality assurance is difficult to standardise to regulate TNHE and CFCRS, existing research studies have acknowledged the importance of evaluating the quality of TNHE and CFCRS (e.g. Hou et al., 2014; M. Hu & Willis, 2017; Lin & Liu, 2007b; Xu & Kan, 2013).

For the Chinese context, the government has adopted various strategies to manage the CFCRS in order to ensure and improve its quality. For instance, according to Hou (2011), the Chinese government has asked institutions to run CFCRS education without charging unreasonable fees, which would make them expensive and perhaps suggest profit-making as the chief motivation. Furthermore, when recruiting students, institutions should use the results of the national university

exam rather than making low standard entry benchmarks in order to attract students who cannot reach a required score in the national university exam. In the process of establishing CFCRS, Chinese universities should seek high-level foreign partners. In teaching and learning processes, at least one-third of the content of such programmes should come from foreign partners.

Some researchers (e.g. Mok & Han, 2016; Xu & Kan, 2013) have also suggested that it is necessary for the Chinese government and MoE to establish a quality assurance mechanism to control and monitor the development of CFCRS. However, in practice, it is still difficult to measure and examine the quality of TNHE and CFCRS, due to their complex and varied settings in cross-system contexts (Knight, 2007). This is because different countries have different provisions and regulations; moreover, different students have multiple experiences and views towards their educational journeys in such programmes (Knight, 2007).

Many researchers (e.g. Ng & Nyland, 2017; Pyvis, 2011; T. Wang, 2016b) have researched practical issues in TNHE and CFCRS and have revealed that the teaching and learning experiences probably reflect the quality of such articulation education. As T. Wang (2016b, p. 226) suggested, it is essential to consider "the equivalence of learning experience" between home and host universities in TNHE. Due to the features of TNHE and CFCRS, the cross-system settings are different in respect of multiple aspects (e.g. educational system structure, teaching content, pedagogical approaches, assessment modes, and even culture and society). Consequently, these cross-system differences could be a challenge for both Chinese and foreign universities when they design CFCRS programmes. These challenges might very well influence the quality of teaching and learning practices.

To deal with such challenges, it is necessary to consider the strategy of "both-and" (Shams & Huisman as cited in T. Wang, 2016b, p. 226), which means that home and host universities strategically manage the connections between teaching and learning in both sites. Through close communications with each other, home and host universities could offer students a smooth pathway for studying in each learning context (T. Wang, 2016b). Notably, it is also important to avoid "educational imperialism" (Pyvis, 2011, p. 741). This means that partners in TNHE should balance the weight of educational status in running these programmes, rather than one side dominating in relation to the design and operation of TNHE.

According to these studies, it is significant to consider and explore how students actually study in specific CFCRS programmes in order to unpack the essence of quality of learning in this cross-system setting. As Shah, Nair, and de la Harpe (2012) argued, students' feedback on their education in TNHE is significant for evaluating and enhancing quality assurance for institutions. Although several studies have initially explored this issue, there is still limited research that has revealed Chinese students' learning trajectories in a 2+2 setting in detail. For instance, through comparatively exploring learning experiences of several Chinese and Singaporean students in two different articulation programmes that were run by an Australian university in China and Singapore respectively, Wallace and Dunn (2008) found that when Australian lecturers taught in these countries, their understandings of cultural differences significantly influenced their teaching and also students' learning. Furthermore, Wallace and Dunn (2008) suggested that many students proposed to closely explore foreign culture to gain experiences of having fluid identities as transitional learners. However, it is necessary for the further study to investigate how students (re)shape their identities in a cross-system educational setting.

More generally, Mok and Ong (2014) suggested that it is necessary to undertake research on students to explore their learning experiences. The student focus is also supported by Qin and Te (2016), who reviewed published journals related to cross-border articulation education in China from 1995 to 2015. Their review drew a conclusion that research about students' learning experiences is still limited (Qin & Te, 2016). Therefore, it is imperative to embark upon detailed research to discover insights about students' learning in articulation programmes.

2.2.5 Current research gaps in CFCRS: The need to explore students' learning experiences.

As already noted, in the field of TNHE research, many researchers have discussed issues related to macro-level issues. For the micro level (e.g. students' learning or teaching issues), some research studies have investigated the students' learning experiences in different types of CFCRS programmes. Notably, in such research, scholars have widely adopted different approaches (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods) to deal with their research topics through different lenses. For instance, Mok and Xu (2008) conducted a survey-based research study to investigate various CFCRS institutions and programmes in Zhejiang Province. In this research, they examined students' views towards their CFCRS study from various perspectives (e.g. teaching mode, class and course arrangements). Drawing a general conclusion, they suggested that participants were satisfied

with learning in CFCRS institutions and programmes, but the quality of learning in such settings should be improved. This study mainly investigated students' views of CFCRS in the Chinese stage, and as such it did not explore what happened in the international contexts.

To understand Chinese students' learning in the transition from China to overseas in an articulation programme, Hou and McDowell (2013) focused on examining the feature of group characteristics in Chinese students' transition from China to the UK. Through interviewing a group of engineering students in a 2+2 articulation programme, they found that some forms of isolation existed between the Chinese students and their UK peers. Due to the programme setting, these students moved to the UK as a group so they had tight connections with each other. However, collective cultural features and language barriers made them feel isolated from their local group counterparts. The language issue was also found to be significant by Yu (2014), who conducted a survey-based research project and then suggested that many students in a 2+2 programme experienced difficulties in achieving English requirements when they were in the Chinese stage, which could lead to communication barriers when they study overseas. These research studies partly revealed communication and language issues of students' transitions into their CFCRS programmes, which offers valuable evidence to be considered in this current doctoral study.

More recently, F. Wang et al. (2016), as programme facilitators and researchers, conducted a case study to explore a group of Chinese students' learning experience in a Masters level articulation programme run by a Chinese and a Canadian university. By adopting interview, questionnaire, and programme evaluation results, these authors suggested that learning in an articulation programme could be challenging for many students as they need to overcome various cross-system differences. Considering the differences between home and host universities, from the perspectives of lecturers and researchers, Ng and Nyland (2016) interviewed several lecturers of a China-Australia 2+2 programme to explore teaching practices issues. Interestingly, they found that Chinese and Australian lecturers seemed to have limited communications with each other to discuss teaching issues in their articulation programmes. This finding indicates that many forms of disconnections exist in such CFCRS programmes in practice.

In contrast, through conducting a survey-based research study investigating the running situation of a China-Canada programme, H. Yang and Lesser (2017), also as programme facilitators

and researchers, found that faculty could deeply engage in the cooperation of running a China-Canada 2+2 programme, especially for providing support to Chinese students in their transition. Furthermore, they suggested that although students still faced language programmes and life issues in the cross-system context, they could develop their intercultural competencies to deal with some problems, which could ensure that their intercultural learning was successful.

According to these examples, it is apparent that students' learning experiences in CFCRS are complex and manifold. Specifically, several features also emerged. First, this existing research mainly focused on investigating students' experiences in one specific programme as a case study. Limited research reveals students' 2+2 learning journeys in different programmes. Second, although some researchers adopted different approaches to investigate their topics, few scholars utilised reflexivity from the lens of a former 2+2 student and a researcher as a research method to critically make sense of learning experiences from both insider and outsider perspectives (Milligan, 2016).

Reflexivity is a process of self-inquiry. It is "a reflexive process where individuals take the opportunity to evaluate their actions in connection with their intentions and thus write a further part of their histories" (Goodson & Gill, 2014, p. 33). To present individual experiences, the narrative could be a useful approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The narrative might include private talks, autobiographies, personal writings, and so on (Goodson & Gill, 2014). However, conducting a narrative-based study is not just collecting these resources and stories (Trahar, 2009). Instead, it is a process of deeply exploring and interpreting how human beings experience different events, moments, and the world that they live in (Connelly & Clandinin 1990). I adopt a reflexive approach that draws on my own experiences in an articulation programme. My approach is not auto-ethnography. Instead, I simple draw reflexively on my own experiences.

It is noteworthy to critically understand the learning experiences in different educational contexts via reflexivity. On the one hand, making sense of Chinese students' lived learning experiences in a 2+2 programme is a multifaceted and complex process that reveals how they approach the educational features of each educational system and how they position themselves across the two contexts. According to Weick (1995), sensemaking is a process of exploring individuals' understanding about what they do in an organisation, how they do it, why they do, and what effects these have from a retrospective perspective. The potential issues and values of such a

setting and students' perceptions could emerge from their commentary on their experiences of their 2+2 learning processes.

Sensemaking, as a useful approach to understanding human experiences, has been widely adopted in education research. For instance, Reyes (2015) conducted a qualitative narrative-based study to explore school leaders' understandings of information and communication technology (ICT) in reforming Singapore education. Based on Weick's (1995) concept of sensemaking and Latour's (2005) Actor-Network-Theory, Reyes (2015) suggested that school leaders' narratives could reflect how they understand the role of ICTs in reforming education, which could be regarded as a sensemaking process of their own experiences as essential actors in the school system.

According to these previous studies, it seems that the 2+2 programme could be considered as an educational model that is established by two organisations. To explore students' learning experiences in different organisations could be a process to make sense of their journeys across two systems, for example, how they study in each system. Students' experiences could illustrate multiple pictures of their sensemaking process about learning in 2+2 programmes. Then, their sensemaking process might allow the researcher (I) to reveal the under-researched topic of Chinese students' learning experiences in 2+2 programmes.

On the other hand, it is necessary to be critically reflexive in understanding the differences between different cultures and societies. "Reflexivity requires people to be self-conscious and knowledgeable about their own cultural traditions and how they are subject to transformation as a result of their engagement with other cultural traditions" (Rizvi, 2015, p. 273). In doing so, through comparatively and retrospectively revealing students' 2+2 learning stories and the researcher's individual experiences, a critical analysis of examining the essence of learning via 2+2 programmes could offer new insights into the current literature.

Third, most studies concentrated on students' attitudes towards their overseas component without carefully exploring their Chinese learning experiences in detail, even though their motivations for selecting CFCRS programmes have been investigated (Fang & Wang, 2014). However, the historical influences of the Chinese educational experiences could play multiple roles in their transitions, which is valuable for consideration in comprehensively investigating students'

learning journey in the 2+2 setting. In doing so, it is necessary to explore how students make sense of their learning in CFCRS programmes.

Moreover, it is worth noting that when people or other academic resources move and/or cooperate together physically and/or virtually, different educational and cultural features could have inevitable collisions with each other. In this situation, various issues may emerge across different cultures and societies. Therefore, due to the feature of articulation programmes, it is essential to consider the whole learning experiences through a comparative perspective while considering the cultural, social, and educational differences between home and host countries.

2.3 The Pandora's Box of Learning in Different Cultural Contexts

2.3.1 The role of culture in transition: Cross-cultural or intercultural?

With the growing trend of internationalisation of HE across the world, students' international mobility potentially increases the communication and interaction of different educational systems and cultures. To understand the influences of such mobility between different countries, researchers (e.g. Gill, 2007; Gu et al., 2010; Ward & Kennedy, 1993) have widely investigated topics related to international students' transitional experiences. Along with the ongoing research in this field, several concepts were proposed to conceptualise and theorise issues of such cross-countries mobility, such as "intercultural", "cross-cultural", "adjustment" and "adaptation".

Practically, the uses of such terminology became complex. These concepts have been adopted interchangeably in some cases when researchers explored students' learning and life experiences in a new context (J. Zhu, 2016). However, "they are not mutually exclusive" but "they embrace different focuses" (Gu et al., 2010, p. 10). Hence, it is important to clarify these concepts because the choice of specific terms could influence the research directions and focus.

Culture is a complex concept and is difficult to define. Various researchers have defined it depending on their individual understandings (e.g. Hofstede, 1980; Kroeber & Parsons, 1958). For instance, Kroeber and Parsons (1958) identified that culture is "transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems as factors in the shaping of human behaviours and artifacts produced through behaviours" (p. 583). To refine the above definition, Hofstede (1980) further defined it as "the collective programming of the human mind that

distinguishes the members of one human group from those of another. Culture, in this sense, is a system of collectively held values" (p. 24). These scholars provided abstract definitions of culture.

Considering the relationships between people, culture, and other elements of a society (e.g. technology), Sarbaugh (1988) suggested that "when we say persons belong to a similar culture, we are saying they share certain psychological, sociological, and technological trappings" (p. 27). According to this explanation, it seems "culture provides tools, habits, and assumptions that pervasively influence human thought and behaviour, and the task of learning does not escape this influence" (Tweed & Lehman, 2002, p. 89). With regard to the connections between culture and learning, McLoughlin (1999) claimed that "culture and learning are interwoven and inseparable" (p. 232). It is evident that culture, technology and education have strong interconnections with each other, which manifest in particular ways in different cultural contexts. When learning happens in multiple contexts, culture and learning generate further multifaceted relationships.

Obviously, culture is the critical focus among the different cultural terminologies. However, due to the prefix differences, there are various terms and focuses on these different concepts. To systematically summarise and comparatively define several culture-related terms, M. Bennett (2010) proposed different concepts, such as multicultural, cross-cultural and intercultural. He further explained the meanings of each concept, which potentially reflect their differences. Specifically, multicultural refers to "a particular kind of situation, one in which there are two or more cultures represented" (M. Bennett, 2010, p. 420). This concept emphasises the existence of various cultures in one setting.

In contrast, cross-cultural indicates "a particular kind of contact among people" who come from different cultural backgrounds (M. Bennett, 2010, p. 420). This concept indicates a strong sense of connection between people from different cultural cohorts. Last but not least, he suggested that intercultural could refer to "a particular kind of interaction or communication among people, one in which differences in cultures play a role in the creation of meaning" or "the kind of skills or competence necessary to deal with cross-cultural contact" (M. Bennett, 2010, p. 420). Through this definition, it is evident that intercultural highlights the importance of peoples' sensemaking ability in different cultural contexts. The intercultural concept is echoed in the current study that tries to make sense of students' learning in a 2+2 cross-system setting.

With regard to learning from intercultural perspectives, many researchers further proposed and defined the concept of intercultural learning. For instance, Alred, Byram and Fleming's study indicates that intercultural learning could refer to "both the experience of encountering two or more different cultures and the learning that occurs through such an encounter" (as cited in Gill, 2007, p. 168). Based on this definition, it seems that students could experience intercultural learning during their 2+2 programmes, which allows them to move to a new context after having experiences in their own cultural and educational context. Their movements from home to host partner institutions potentially make learning become intercultural. More specifically, M. Bennett (2009) suggested that intercultural learning refers to:

> Acquiring an increased awareness of subjective cultural context (worldview), including one's own, and developing greater ability to interact sensitively and competently across cultural contexts as both an immediate and long-term effect of exchange. (p. S2)

This definition further reveals that students' self-understanding of the cultural differences and their capabilities to deal with these differences were also vital for them to experience intercultural learning. Students may have both inter and cross-cultural experiences when they study and live in a new context that may be multicultural. In this complicated learning process, students usually have to experience tensions generated from the different cultural contexts, especially when these two systems have dramatic differences (Engeström, 1987).

To deal with potential cross-system tensions, students may have various attitudes and strategies. Many terms have been adopted to describe the transferring processes of international students into a new context. According to J. Zhu (2016), a series of terms usually appear in multiple research studies (e.g. communication, education, and psychology) that investigate students' intercultural learning, for example, adjustment and adaptation. However, being similar to the features of intercultural and cross-cultural, these concepts can be used interchangeably in practice, which also makes people confused. Therefore, it is necessary to make sense of the meanings of these terms.

Researchers (e.g. Anderson, 1994; Shaffer & Shoben, 1956; Young & Schartner, 2014) have widely discussed the meanings, similarities, and differences between adjustment and adaptation. For instance, Shaffer and Shoben suggested that *adjustment* refers to "the reduction or satisfaction of (short-term) drives, whereas *adaptation* is that which is valuable for (long-term) individual or racial

survival" (as cited in Anderson, 1994, p. 300). Through comparing different authors' definitions, J. Zhu (2016) indicated a similar finding with Shaffer and Shoben (1956) who found that the adjustment usually stress short-term intercultural experiences, but in contrast adaptation usually refers to long-term changes from one to another cultural context. However, no matter the short or long term focuses, all these concepts indicate "the achievement of a fit between the person and the environment" (Anderson, 1994, p. 300).

Compared to these time-based differences, Young and Schartner (2014) identified that the adjustment is a process of change, which can be explored over time, while adaptation can be considered as a measurable outcome of this process. Based on these differences and features of adjustment and adaptation, this study investigates Chinese students' intercultural learning adjustment experiences in their 2+2 programmes with initial explorations of their adaptations from Chinese to Australian academic environments.

2.3.2 Cultural and learning differences between culturally eastern and western contexts.

The setting of 2+2 programme positions students in two learning contexts that may have specific educational, social, and cultural features. As mentioned above, in this study, the 2+2 setting is based on China and Australia. These countries (e.g. China and Australia) are identified as having dramatically different social and cultural features. The existing framework of national cultural differences proposed by Hofstede (1984) does not include mainland China as a research subject. However, Hong Kong and Taiwan share a similar cultural heritage and ideology with mainland China are examined by comparing with many other countries (e.g. Australia, the UK and the USA).

Hofstede's (1984) national cultural framework suggests that culturally western countries have various multiple differences from culturally eastern countries. Specifically, five dimensions are proposed to theorise the differences, including power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism vs individualism, and femininity vs masculinity, and long-term vs short orientation. For instance, people from a collectivist culture (e.g. China) usually do not confront others but they prefer to show their harmony and respect, which indicates a sense of dependence. In learning, students in a collectivist culture are used to a teacher-dominated model. In contrast, people from individualist contexts usually prefer to directly present their minds and ideas, which show highly independent features. Studying in this context, students may be used to a more flexible model.

Although these concepts help people to theoretically recognise the different cultures among different countries, it still has some potential issues. For instance, it has been critically argued that such stereotyped classification is not suitable for examining individual cases, as each person could have different reflections towards their contexts (Montgomery, 2010). To refine the framework, Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010) further explained that although individuals have various differences, the features of national cultures might also always be reflected by their personalities and behaviours.

In the field of cross-cultural education, many researchers have critically investigated the characteristics and influences of Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) on students' overseas study experiences (e.g. Biggs, 1998; Chan, 1999; Kember, 2016b; J. Li, 2003a; Samuelowicz, 1987; Volet & Renshaw, 1996). The CHC is recognised as a dominant cultural ideology in Chinese society and even other Asian countries. It is worth noting that CHC has been considered as a label to represent East-Asian cultures and nations, primarily when people use it to compare with so-called Western culture (Biggs, 1998). This understanding is also supported by Park who suggested that "Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC), has been described by the educational research community as a group of Asian nation-states with their motherland and overseas population who share Confucian values, which consistently reflect in their behavior and social practices, including learning styles and academic outcomes" (Park as cited in Park, 2018, p. 56). In this study, CHC is considered as a broader concept (or a well-accepted label) to represent the general Chinese culture rather than thoughts, ideas, and sayings exactly and initially proposed by Confucius. Understanding the differences between cultural terminologies is not the primary focus of this doctoral study.

The CHC is intensely embedded in Chinese history and esteemed in different fields, especially in education (Mu, 2014b). Mainly, the educational ideology of CHC has profound influences on Chinese students' learning approaches (J. Li, 2003a). Along with the increasing interests of Chinese and other Asian students who are culturally influenced by CHC, arguments about their features of learning also become important to critically understand intercultural adjustment issues, especially when they move to several English-speaking countries. According to Otten (2003), "giving students an intercultural dimension in education is one of the many goals that guides present internationalisation strategies" (p. 12).

2.3.3 Stereotyped views of Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) and Chinese students.

According to Henze and Zhu (2012), many studies of Chinese students' cross-cultural education reveal the negative aspects of their learning approaches and attitudes. These negative features include rote and passive learning, repetition and memorisation, and surface learning (Henze & Zhu, 2012). For instance, Samuelowicz (1987) investigated the learning experiences of international students at an Australian university and suggested that many CHC students relied excessively on their lecturers, who were considered as the authority in the classroom. In learning processes, many students avoided asking critical questions and preferred to listen to instructions without enough active engagement in interactions. From Western scholars' perspective, Volet and Renshaw (1996, p. 205) summarised that:

> These students are described as having the following features: respectful of the lecturer's authority; diligent note-takers; preoccupied with fulfilling the expectations of the lecturers; uncritical of information presented in the textbook and by the lecturers; seldom asking questions or volunteering to contribute to tutorial discussions; and unaware of the conventions regarding acknowledging quotes and referencing sources and therefore unwittingly guilty of plagiarism.

Similarly, Chan (1999) found that CHC emphasises the authority and role of lecturers in the classroom, where teachers should control both teaching and learning. In doing so, many Chinese students influenced by CHC prefer to pay attention to receiving and listening to information rather than putting their ideas forward. If a student argues with the lecturer about the content taught during the class, then the challenge could be considered as discourteous behaviours, which implies that the student may not respect the lecturer (Cheng, 2000).

To some extent, these cultural influences could limit the self-motivated learning desires of Chinese students, who are already accustomed to a teacher-centred environment, exam-directed and passively rote learning (Tu, 2001). Accordingly, these learning habits potentially make Chinese students become quiet in learning when they study in foreign university classrooms, where the lecturers usually encourage and guide peers to discuss topics and learn with each other critically and creatively (Biggs, 1994). Therefore, many CHC students could feel challenging to adapt to the Western learning settings (Chan, 1999).

By comparing teaching and learning differences between Chinese and British lecturers and students, Cortazzi and Jin (1996) proposed various features of each side. For instance, in the Chinese context, learning content comes from instruction and textbooks; learning means repeated practices and memorisation; students are usually listeners who could be used to relying on lecturers or other people. In contrast, in the UK context, individuals have more room to study as independent learners; lecturers and students have more communications and interactions. These features seem to generalise the significant differences of teaching and learning practices between China, which has a CHC dominant society, and Western countries.

Influenced by Hofstede's cultural frameworks, Cortazzi and Jin (1997) further developed the culture of learning theory from the perspective of Chinese students. These authors argued that when students study in an environment that is shaped and influenced by different cultures, they "not only carry cultural behaviours and concepts into the classroom but that they also use the specific framework of their cultures to interpret and assess other people's words, actions and academic performances" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997, p. 77). Their culture of learning framework and theory could reflect a series of cultural differences in teaching and learning between China and the UK. Precisely, their summarised features of teaching and learning preferences in the Chinese context echo the findings of many other studies (e.g. Chan, 1999; Cheng, 2000; Tu, 2001) that explored the influences of CHC on shaping Chinese students' learning strategies.

According to the various arguments of CHC and Chinese students' learning, it is apparent that when individuals move to countries that may have dramatic features compared to their home country, cultural differences could partly influence their actions, thoughts, and views in the new context. In this case, individuals could face various differences in the process of transition from home country to another one, which may generate several barriers that make intercultural learning a struggle to some extent. However, these findings do not signify that Chinese students' learning cannot be successful in culturally western contexts and that CHC always has passive influences on Chinese students' learning. For instance, although Cortazzi and Jin (1996) have summarised various differences in teaching and learning between Chinese and British contexts, using this framework to label Chinese students' learning practices is not fully reliable. As T. Wang (2008) argued, it is necessary to acknowledge that Chinese students' learning in a cross-system context is far more complicated than what people usually understand by holding several stereotyped views of Chinese students, especially

in the TNHE context. Various scholars have challenged these stereotyped views of CHC and Chinese students (e.g. Biggs, 1994, 1996a; Cheng, 2000; Kember, 1996; J. Li, 1996). As Grimshaw (2007, p. 308) argued, "when seeking to understand the behaviour and attitudes of Chinese students, we should not allow ourselves to be led by our own preconceptions, but should instead pay attention to what those students actually do and say". Hence, it is necessary to reconsider Chinese students and their cultural background rather than holding stereotyped views (Grimshaw, 2007).

2.3.4 Critical understandings of CHC and Chinese students.

With the increasing number of Chinese students who achieve outstanding academic outcomes in universities of Western countries, their performances in learning make scholars critically reconsider their conventional understandings of Chinese students. Accordingly, many researchers identified the positive influences of CHC on Chinese students' cross-cultural learning experiences. Representatively, Biggs (1994) started to challenge stereotyped views of Chinese students' learning approaches (e.g. surface learning, rote learning, and memorisation). He identified that Chinese students actually could achieve so-called deep learning via surface approaches, rote-learning, and memorisation (Biggs, 1996a).

Furthermore, some scholars suggest that CHC inspires students to learn with each other and study hard, which emphasises the role of effort. For instance, Cheng (2000), Marton, Dall'Alba, and Kun (1996) suggested that CHC encourages students to learn with their peers and think in an in-depth way. Many CHC proverbs indicate that students need to study, to communicate with other peers and to critically analyse knowledge (Cheng, 2000; J. Li, 2003a). For example, Confucius advocates "*San Ren Xing, Bi You Wo Shi*" *(三人行，必有我师)*, a well-known saying in CHC that means "among three persons, there must be one who can be my teacher" (Cheng, 2000, p. 440). Furthermore, Cheng (2000) demonstrated a well-known motto of CHC, "*Qin Xue Hao Wen*" *(勤学好问)*, which means that students should study diligently and have a great curiosity to ask questions. According to these traditional sayings, it is evident that CHC does not ask students to follow whatever lecturers teach in the classroom without applying any critical thinking (Cheng, 2000). These sayings also imply that students need to communicate and learn with other people rather than merely study independently (J. Li, 2003a).

CHC encourages students to think deeply as well as enabling understanding and memorisation of course content during the study, which is indispensable for knowledge development (Kember, 1996). Marton et al. (1996), as well as Tweed and Lehman (2002), argued that even though CHC background students are in favour of rote passive learning and memorisation, it does not mean that they do not understand the content and think critically. On the other hand, "they see memorisation as a path to understanding and vice versa" (Tweed & Lehman, 2002, p. 93). For instance, through both in-depth critical investigating and memorising formulas, CHC background students often achieve better learning outcomes than Western students in some subjects, such as mathematics and science (Biggs, 1994; Mu, 2014a). These learning strategies have become a universal identifier of Chinese students (Biggs, 1994). Based on the literature review, it is apparent that CHC has complex influences on Chinese students' learning styles, attitudes and approaches.

Notably, several studies (e.g. Briguglio & Smith, 2012; Renshaw & Volet, 1995) have shown the adaptation of Chinese students to Australian education settings and the changes in their study habits. By conducting a mixed methods study, Renshaw and Volet (1995) examined the learning performance of a group of CHC students in one Australian university. They noted that these students preferred to consult with peers, explore the knowledge in the textbook, and communicate with their lecturers in learning processes. Through intercultural learning, CHC background students can adapt to the Australian learning setting and achieve their academic goals (Renshaw & Volet, 1995).

These findings partly challenge some stereotyped views that many CHC students always prefer to passively follow instructions in learning without enough actively personal explorations (e.g. Samuelowicz, 1987). Moreover, these findings also resonate with the results found by Cheng (2000), Marton et al. (1996), Tweed and Lehman (2002), who concluded that CHC advocates learners to adopt different approaches to study in international contexts depending on learning requirement rather than mainly utilise traditional ways. They could interchangeably adopt memorisation and repetition as useful strategies to help them genuinely master knowledge (Kember, 2000).

Based on the constant arguments about CHC and Chinese students, more recently, Kember (2016b) claimed that it is impossible to merely define, label and compare the features of Chinese teaching and learning strategies with so-called western perspectives by using thick, surface or other terms. This is because "there is never homogeneity within a cultural group" (Kember, 2016b, p. 185).

In contrast, it is important to make sense of different situations via different ever-changing perspectives because "there is a rich and complex tapestry of variations arising from cultural distinctions, individual variations and background circumstances" (Kember, 2016b, p. 185).

Through discussing the features of CHC and debates about Chinese students, it is evident that culture and students' identity as learners, who may have different learning strategies in different contexts, could have important connections. Several researchers (e.g. Hall, 1992; Jenkins, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991) have discussed the relationships between identity and culture, society and learning. For instance, Hall (1990) suggested that identity is a fluid concept concurrent with the changes of history and culture that people experience in life. This means that there is no fixed identity; however, "perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall 1990, p. 222). Hence, it seems that when Chinese students move to/between different contexts, they may (re)shape their identities to position themselves to fit into a certain environment. As Jenkins (2008) argued, "identity is constructed in transactions at and across the boundary" (p. 44). Consequently, students' sense of belonging could also be (re)shaped depending on their experiences across different contexts.

Meanwhile, as numerous studies indicated above, many Chinese students are able to achieve outstanding outcomes in their study at foreign universities. This finding indicates that they may feel empowered in dealing with learning issues in a new context, which shows a positive sense of agency. However, as mentioned in Chapter 1, it is worth noting that when people engage in cross-system settings, they may reflect different senses of agency towards social, cultural, and educational differences from the perspective of interconnections between mental intentions and physical performances (Park, 2018). Hence, the development of a capacity for the agency is a complicated process that involves multiple social and cultural interactions (Bandura, 2006). This process needs people to realise "causal relations between environmental events, through understanding causation via action, and finally to recognising oneself as the agent of the actions" (Bandura, 2006, p. 169).

Through this critical review of different arguments about the various features of CHC and Chinese students, it is apparent that students' learning is a complex process. The application of

stereotypes here is not at all useful. Importantly, for researchers, it is necessary to comprehensively consider individual situations and differences in different cultural and educational contexts (Gieve & Clark, 2005). With regard to the Chinese students, according to Park (2011), "CHC has evolved, is evolving, and is always immersed in a context that is situated in space, time, history and social structures" (p. 382). Therefore, it is important to critically examine the potential influences of CHC on students' transition between different spaces, contexts, and societies because cultural features may deeply immerse in students' understandings and constructions of their identity, agency, and belonging when they face potential cross-system differences. As mentioned above, in existing research, limited studies explored Chinese students' learning experiences by attempting to make sense of their journeys in 2+2 programmes. In doing so, this study proposes to make sense of Chinese students' learning stories and perspectives in 2+2 programmes by considering the cultural features that could be reflected via their lived experiences.

2.4 Theoretical Developments of Intercultural Learning and Adjustment

2.4.1 Various shocks in transition: Barriers in adjustment.

The influences of cultural differences on people can be considered as "shocks." Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, and Todman (2008) suggested that shock could be seen as "the stimulus for the acquisition of culture-specific skills that are required to engage in new social interactions" (p. 65). It is obvious that shocks could be multiple and complex as different people could have diverse types of reactions to a new environment that they are not familiar with.

As Gu (2016a) summarised, there are various shocks to represent the complex issues in the intercultural learning and adjustment, such as cultural shock, learning shock, language shock, and role shock. Explicitly, the cultural shock could be considered as an overarching term to conceptualise people's sense of unfamiliarity in cross-system or cultural transitions. Other kinds of shocks seem to be different subsets of sound reflections to the cultural shock that provides a space for individuals to experience specific differences in a cross-cultural setting (Zhou et al., 2008).

Culture shock is a well-documented term to explain the cross-cultural issues in the transition from a familiar context to another unfamiliar one. The research related to cultural shock has been widely conducted for many decades (Adler, 1975; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Lysgaand, 1955; Oberg, 1960; Smalley, 1963; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Winkelman,

1994). The definitions of culture shock have been proposed by various researchers. According to Oberg (1960), cultural shock is a sense "precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (p. 142). Similarly, Schumann (1986) advocated that it can be considered as "anxiety resulting from the disorientation encountered upon entering a new culture" (p. 383). According to these definitions, it is apparent that cultural shock may lead to a struggling sense of intercultural adjustment. To understand the process of experiencing intercultural adjustment under the influence of cultural shocks, various researchers have proposed particular conceptual frameworks.

In the early stage, research studies have been conducted mainly from the medical perspective of mental health. For instance, Lysgaand (1955) proposed the famous U-curve (figure 2.1) to illustrate the adjustment process to a new context. The U-curve theory suggests that people could initially feel it is easy to adjust to the new context; however, they usually notice the barriers in adjustment, which make them struggle; with the constant changes, finally, people could integrate to the new context successfully.

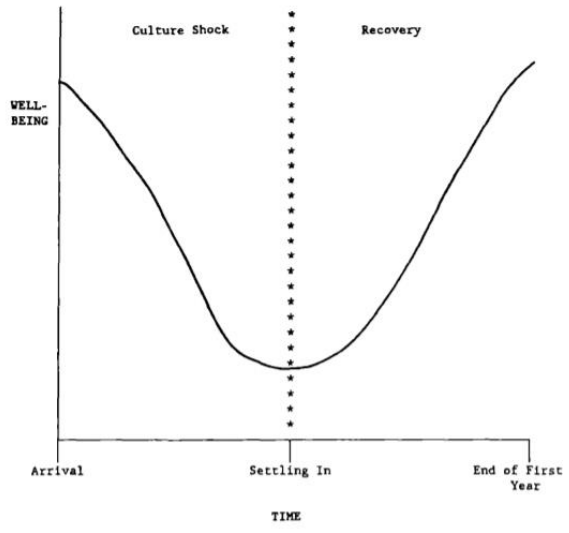

Figure 2.1 Generalised U-Curve (source from Zapf, 1991)

Based on the U-curve theory, Oberg (1960) further developed a model to conceptualise intercultural adjustment processes. He suggests that there are four stages that people could experience in their adjustment process to a new context, including the honeymoon, culture shock, recovery, and adjustment. Based on the U-model and the concept of cultural shock, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) developed a W-curve to extend the U-model. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, the W-curve (Figure

2.2) suggested five stages of adjustment to a new context, which are “Honeymoon”, “Culture Shock”, “Initial Adjustment”, “Mental Isolation”, and “Acceptance and Integration”. Specifically, the honeymoon refers to people’s sense of excitement when they move to a new place. The cultural shock means the stress that people may have when they faced different social, cultural, and education contexts, which made them feel challenging to engage in. The initial adjustment suggests that people start to develop their confidence to adjust to the new context and try to overcome cross-system barriers in their transitions. The mental isolation refers to a lack of sense of belonging, which make people recall their previous life in home countries. In this stage, the values and customs of the new context are still not integrated into their minds. Finally, after staying in a new context for a long time, people may adjust to the new context, which is the last stage of W-model as acceptance, integration and connectedness.

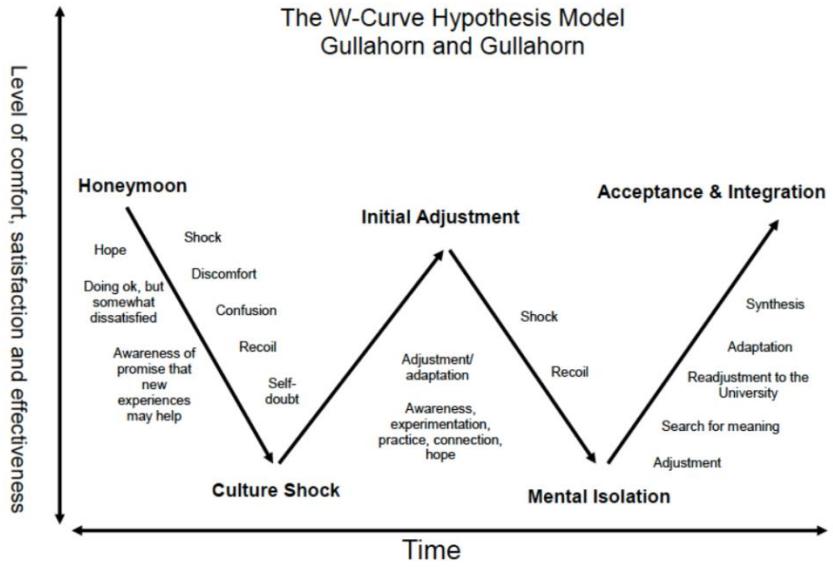

Figure 2.2 W-Curve model (source from Hoffenburger, Mosier, & Stokes, 1999)

To refine these existing models, Adler (1975) critically proposed five stages of transnational adjustment, including contact, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy, and independence. These frameworks initially conceptualise the process of intercultural adjustment from examining persons’ mental development. Although they established fundamental knowledge of understanding the process of intercultural adjustment, they are somehow limited in identifying only specific examples of shocks in learning processes.

Influenced by these early cultural shock theories, researchers started to investigate more particular types of shocks in the process of intercultural adjustment and adaptation. For instance, Gu

(2009) identified that many students might experience a series of learning shocks in the process of intercultural adjustment. According to Gu (2009), learning shock means that when students start learning in an unfamiliar learning context, they could have difficulties and stressful feelings for dealing with the learning issues. Their difficulties could lead to long-term non-adaptation to the new context, which could cause further unpleasantness in respect of their life and study if students cannot adapt to the new environment (Gu, 2009). The cause of learning shock in the process of intercultural learning and adjustment could be due to both internal and external reasons, such as unfamiliarity with the new environment, different teaching and learning strategies, language barriers, and individuals' personality (Cushner & Karim, 2004; Schumann, 1986).

To deal with different shocks in intercultural learning and adjustment, students could adopt different approaches to deal with barriers, have various attitudes towards cross-system differences, and achieve various results through experiencing intercultural adjustment processes. Their individual changes could become far more complicated than what they were in their home contexts. To explore such changes, it is necessary to examine students' identity as students who study in multiple cultural and educational contexts (Gieve & Clark, 2005). Furthermore, their agency indicating capabilities and preferences to deal with cross-system differences and their sense of belonging as intercultural students in a new context could be also considered as significant aspects to make sense of their intercultural learning and adjustment (Gu, 2016b).

2.4.2 The trajectory of intercultural learning and adjustment: What it looks like?

Research has widely discussed the trajectory of intercultural adjustment. As mentioned above, many early theoretical models (e.g. the U-shape and the W-shape) have been proposed to conceptualise adjustment issues. Mostly, the process of intercultural adjustment is to develop intercultural competence, which is considered as "an adaptive capacity based on an inclusive and integrative worldview which allows participants to effectively accommodate the demands of living in a host culture" (E. Taylor, 1994a, p. 154).

In a cross-cultural learning context, Kuh and Love (2000) argued that when students move to a cultural context that was different from their previous environment, they will encounter various challenges to adjust to the new context. Influenced by previous models, several researchers (e.g. M. Bennett, 1986; Berry, 1997; Gill, 2007; Y. Kim, 1988, 2001; Y. Kim & Ruben, 1988; Kuh & Love,

2000; Mezirow, 1991; Searle & Ward, 1990; E. Taylor, 1994b; Yoshikawa, 1988) further developed their theories and frameworks to understand the trajectory of fostering intercultural competency from multiple perspectives, which is known as intercultural adjustment or transformation (Y. Kim & Ruben, 1988; E. Taylor, 1994a). In the process of adjustment to the new context, students usually experience cultural shocks or other kinds of barriers, as previously mentioned.

Notably, most of these researchers (e.g. M. Bennett, 1986; Gill, 2007; Y. Kim, 1988; Y. Kim & Ruben, 1988; Yoshikawa, 1988) have argued that students can actively deal with shocks in the process of intercultural adjustment and finally develop their positive intercultural competence that is an outcome of intercultural learning. The intercultural competence can be considered as "a long-term change of a person's knowledge (cognition), attitudes (emotions), and skills (behaviour) to enable positive and effective interaction with members of other cultures both abroad and at home" (Otten, 2003, p. 15).

Specifically, to theoretically conceptualise this process, Y. Kim (1988, p. 308) proposed a three-fold processes framework, which is well-known as "stress-adaptation-growth". In her explanation, "stress, as such, is a manifestation of the generic process that occurs whenever the capabilities of the individual are not adequate to the demands of the environment" (Y. Kim, 2001, p. 55). Stress usually exist in the initial stage of entering into a new context. Facing stress, students start to seek different approaches that can help them to overcome problems and then fit into the new context. Finally, students could become familiar with the new context and then achieve development, which is usually considered as a positive direction or result of intercultural adjustment and transformation.

Importantly, Y. Kim (1988) advocated that this adjustment process is dynamic and circular (see Figure 2.3). The stress-adaptation-development is a spiral cycle rather than a linear and one-way process. This is because "looking backwards to the original culture" is an unavoidable process in intercultural learning and adjustment (Y. Kim, 2001, p. 56). Importantly, many people could measure the new context via their old lens. In this case, various tensions and judgments are emerged for them to conduct self-reflexivity of experiencing different cultural contexts.

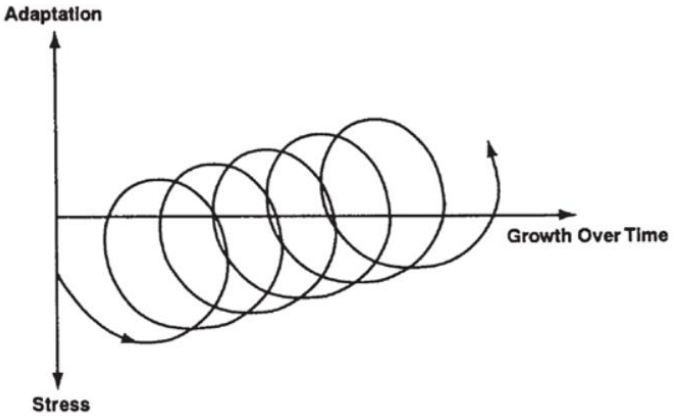

Figure 2.3 Stress-Adaptation-Growth model (source from Y. Kim, 2001)

Through this spiral cycle, newcomers might engage in the new context with complex internal cognition, as some features of the new culture could potentially be incorporated into their mind. Finally, they could have "a subtle growth" as they may create their own ways to deal with cross-system barriers (Y. Kim, 2001, p. 56). After gaining growth via overcoming stress and adapting to the specific situation, newcomers may face different types of stress and then they restart this process (Y. Kim, 2001). Although the stress-adaptation-growth model has been widely adopted to examine intercultural/cross-cultural adaptation issues, researchers further developed their framework to enhance this existing model to explore Chinese students' intercultural adjustment processes.

Influenced by Y. Kim's (1988) and other researchers' (e.g. Oberg, 1960; Adler, 1975) intercultural adjustment models as mentioned above, Gill (2007) proposed a transformative framework to theorise the cyclic development of Chinese students' intercultural learning and adjustment based on interviewing several Chinese students in the UK context. This framework has three major dimensions (see Figure 2.4), including "intercultural adaptation, developing intercultural competence, and the reconstruction of self-identity, all leading to personal growth" (Gill, 2007, p. 171).

Figure 2.4 Interconnected facets of the intercultural learning process (source from Gill, 2007)

Similar to Y. Kim's (1988, 2001) stress-adaptation-growth model, this framework also suggests that students start with various stress when they learn in an unfamiliar context that may have dramatic differences compared with their original environment. To avoid disequilibrium, students might actively engage in and interact with the new context by adopting multiple strategies (e.g. establishing new networks). During this process, they develop intercultural competence and change their mode of thinking, values, and attitudes, in which they experience transformations such as changes in their perspectives, indicating how they critically consider the relationships between individual roles and the context (Mezirow, 2000).

Consequently, their identity as students who experience intercultural learning could be reshaped and become different compared with their old roles (Gill, 2007). Considering the change of identity, Yoshikawa (1988) specifically argued that people could animatedly move between home and host countries with different senses of identity, which could be seen as in-betweenness among different contexts. In this situation, they may gain various features from both contexts during their intercultural adjustment and learning.

To theorise these changes, Gill (2007) argued that intercultural adaptation is parallel with intercultural learning. Students' experiences are about their individual changes and perspective transformation, in which they could make sense of their own vibrant and cyclic trajectory of adjustment to the new context that has significant influences on shaping students' changes. As Gill (2007) further suggested, students' experiences of interactions with the new context and their reflections potentially create an intercultural space for them to dynamically accommodate different cultural, social, and educational factors.

In the process of intercultural movement, many students "experience a sense of boundary or "otherness" when confronted with conflicting values and beliefs" (Gu & Maley, 2008, p. 225). As Bhabha (1994) indicated, the boundary is a site that allows different cultures to be interactive. He further suggested that sociocultural interactions are complex; importantly, different cultures keep negotiating with each other, which creates a space of cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994). In this space, according to previous studies (e.g. Gu & Maley, 2008; Gu et al., 2010; Ward & Kennedy, 1993), Chinese students usually experienced a series of shocks (e.g. in relation to culture, learning, role, and language) when they studied in a new sociocultural context. The elements together created these shocks in the transition between different contexts. Students' dynamic changes in the intercultural learning process also reflect how they approached adjustment issues in the 2+2 in-between learning space that enables students to experience various changes in respect to agency, identity, and belonging.

To date, limited studies have adopted the framework of stress-adaptation-growth to illustrate the trajectory of Chinese students' intercultural learning and adjustments, especially in China-Australia 2+2 articulation programmes. The dominant studies focus on the group of students who usually complete four years of undergraduate study in China and then study overseas for further advanced degrees (e.g. Masters or PhD). Although they do experience intercultural learning and adjustment, the contexts and mode of going overseas are different from the CFCRS setting that is officially run jointly by Chinese and foreign university partners.

The aims of designing and offering such 2+2 programmes are multiple, for example, offering different educational experiences for students, increasing the internationalisation of Chinese universities, and enhancing the quality of HE in China via engaging in cooperation with foreign partners (Mok & Han, 2017; R. Yang, 2014). When students study in the 2+2 mode, they usually need to physically move from one (e.g. the Chinese) context to another (e.g. the Australian) to complete the whole programme. In this mode, students not only need to engage with the Chinese educational system, but also with the Australian one. In such a learning process, they may also need to adjust to each context through their explorations and understandings of educational, cultural, and social features in the two different systems. Although the goal of such articulation programmes (e.g. the 2+2 mode) is not solely for students to experience intercultural adjustment during their study, students nevertheless will most likely face such adjustment issues in their transitions from the home to the host contexts. What such intercultural learning and adjustment look like in CFCRS 2+2 settings

is under-researched. Thus, this study proposed to specifically explore Chinese students' learning experiences from the perspective of intercultural adjustment in the 2+2 settings rather than investigate other aspects.

2.4.3 Moving across different spaces and places as diaspora.

As Gill (2007) suggested, it is worthwhile to know that there is an intercultural space for students to engage in cross-system learning and adjustment. This space not only is a mediation of experiencing intercultural adjustment, but is also a bridge to learning across different contexts. Along with understanding students' experiences of intercultural learning and adjustment, it is also essential to explore in what kind of context they engage in potential changes during their cross-system learning processes.

Globalisation and internationalisation motivate constant physical and virtual movements of people, culture, education, information and many other social elements around the world (Appadurai, 1996). According to Rizvi, Louie, and Evans (2016), long-stay international students can be seen as an essential component of what they refer to as diaspora, which initially comes from the Greek as a concept to describe people who leave their home country and settle in a new land. Moreover, the diaspora can refer to "a system of personal networks, shared culture and language, and an imaginary relationship to the homeland" (Kapur as cited in R. Yang & Welch, 2010, p. 594). With regard to 2+2 students, as they do need to move to another country to complete their study, they could be considered as a specific group of the diaspora because their learning activities happen across two settings under several so-called institutional collaborations, which may let them have constant connections between home and host contexts. The concept of diaspora highlights the importance of continuing influences of students' homeland on their lives during the overseas study and the continuing transitional interactions between home and host countries (Wong as cited in R. Yang & Welch, 2010).

The ongoing wave of globalisation and internationalisation of HE makes the construction of learning space become much more complex across different cultures, societies, and educational systems. Notably, several researchers (e.g. Bhabha, 1994; A. Feng, 2009; Soja, 1996) from different disciplines propose the concept of "third space" to conceptualise the complexity of the changes of space across culture, societies, and countries. Bhabha's (1994) concept of third space based on the postcolonial perspective has been widely adopted to analyse cross-culture related studies. Bhabha

(1994) argued that there is a third space that makes the concept of the nation become blurred and people could move physically and psychologically between their own and host cultural contexts, which is also considered as an "in-between" space.

In such a space, people do not try to "seek consensus, but rather one in which to open up possibilities" (Kelly, 2016, p. 69). In doing so, a sense of cultural hybridity is generated from the third space that provides a platform for people to experience "something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211). As a consequence, people could immerse in a status of in-between with dynamic and multiple perspectives towards the cultural differences (Bhabha, 1994).

Based on Bhabha's concept of third space, Feng (2009) investigated several Chinese students' learning experience in the UK context. By adopting interview and observation, Feng (2009) found that Chinese students' classroom performance and lecturer's teaching indicated various differences that could challenge some stereotyped views of the learning and teaching features between different countries that have specific cultural and social traditions. In contrast, Feng's (2009, p. 75) study suggested that there is a third space that:

> ...not only challenges traditional views of the elusive notion of culture but more importantly problematises our "normal," polarised or binary perceptions of the relationships between, for example, the West and the East, intercultural and intercultural communication, education and training, and deep learning and surface learning…

According to this argument, "the concept of third space is particularly insightful when we study the experience of international mobile students" with "its strong proposition to contest binary or polar opposites such as Confucian and Socratic cultures of learning" (Feng, 2009, p. 87). The potential different cultures of learning actually reflect the cultural differences between national contexts (Planel, 2016). Therefore, it is significant for researchers to continually consider and negotiate differences of learning from a fluid position of insider and outsider of the research context with flexible views towards different social, cultural, and education contexts (McNess, Arthur, & Crossley, 2016; Planel, 2016). This is because the essential elements in education (e.g. lecturers, students, learning, and assessment) may have different meanings in different educational contexts

(Planel, 2016). In this case, the concept of third space becomes vital to construct new views about intercultural learning and adjustment.

Such third space could be considered as abstract "new spaces and places" (Leander, Phillips, & Taylor, 2010, p. 329) for people to see the essence of the visible "appearance of solidity" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 92). "The third space is neither inside nor outside but pivots across the differences between being outside and being inside" (McNess et al., 2016, p. 27). In this process, students may live in between the new and old contexts (McNess et al., 2016). For most international students, the learning journey from the homeland to other countries can be regarded as "a movement from a known place into something at first unknown—a space—which with time itself becomes known as a place" (Burnapp, 2006, p. 83). Although the third space has been theoretically used to describe something different and abstract, it is essential to discuss the original conceptualisations of these and related concepts, which could reveal the original root of third or in-between space.

The concepts of space and place have been widely discussed from both empirical and theoretical perspectives in and across various academic fields, such as philosophy (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Casey, 1997), sociology (e.g. Brennan, 2006; Gieryn, 2000; Latour, 2005; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Amin, 2002), culture-related studies (e.g. Bhabha, 1994; Feng, 2009; Gill, 2007; Rutherford, 1990), learning perspectives (e.g. Ellis & Goodyear, 2016; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Matthews, Andrews, & Adams, 2011; Savin-Baden, McFarland, & Savin-Baden, 2008; Temple, 2008), and geographic experiences (e.g. Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). For instance, Tuan (1977, p. 6) attempted to clarify these two concepts:

> The ideas "space" and "place" require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then the place is a pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for a location to be transformed into place.

As this explanation indicates, space and place sit in a tight relationship with each other. According to Lukermann (as cited in Relph, 1976), the notion of place is a complex concept that integrates natural and cultural features of specific locations. Different places are connected by the movement of different social subjects (e.g. people and goods). The movement of different objects from one to another place potentially generates the flow of ideology, materials and many other

elements. Such movements might create various spaces that allow people to engage in constant negotiations with different cultural, social, and educational contexts.

The concept of space is much more abstract than that of place. Relph (1976) indicated that "space is amorphous and intangible and not an entity that can be directly described and analysed" (p. 8). Tuan (1977) explained the relationship between place and space. In everyday life, people not only interact with the physically real places that they stay in, but also develop their own understanding toward the places in their minds, which generate the abstractly intangible space for themselves (Tuan, 1977). In doing so, people may integrate their own views, ideas, and feelings with the constructing process of the abstract space (Tuan, 1977).

Similarly, according to Brennan (2006), it seems that the concept of place is more "solid" or "fixed" than that of space, which is more "abstract". As Brennan (2006) argued, space could be considered as a virtual room that allows different cultures, histories, and activities to interact without boundaries. Brennan (2006, p. 136) suggested that "space is more abstract and ubiquitous: it connotes capital, history, and activity, and gestures towards the meaninglessness of distance in a world of instantaneous communication and virtuality". In contrast, the place is more about one's experiences on or at a particular site that has certain boundaries, which connotes "the kernel or centre of one's memory and experience-a dwelling, a familiar park or city streets, one's family or community" (Brennan, 2006, p. 136). Although these researchers make several distinctions between space and place, some philosophers (e.g. Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Casey, 1997) provided their specific interpretations about the relationships of the two concepts from a philosophical perspective.

In *The Fate of Place*, Casey (1997) comparatively analysed the different views of place and space proposed by several philosophers, for example, Deleuze and Guattari (1987), who critically illustrated the interconnections of the above two concepts in their monumental work, *A Thousand Plateaus*. In chapter 12 (Treatise on Nomadology: The War Machine) of their book, Deleuze and Guattari interpreted place and space by using the relationships between royal king and nomad and then different types of science (e.g. the comparison between mathematics/physics and metallurgy/hydraulics) as metaphors. According to Casey (1997), mathematics/physics are considered as some kinds of "royal sciences" that are foundational for other related fields (e.g. metallurgy/hydraulics) and universal across the world. In contrast, for example,

metallurgy/hydraulics are “nomad sciences”, which not only have flexibility, but also follow specific fixed rules from royal sciences.

For instance, engineers could use hydraulics knowledge to design sewer systems for city A and city B. In practice, they usually need to consider how to use specific knowledge from nomad science to design a specific system for these different cities that have unique geographical features. Although they may propose different plans depending on their nomad knowledge, they may also need to use the same math knowledge to calculate the length of a pipeline to ensure that it fits into a proposed installation position. As this example indicates, nomad science is usually applied in different places with different approaches and is complicated to be calculated precisely (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

In contrast, royal science (e.g. math) is universal and measurable but abstract without specific meanings if it is not linked with nomad knowledge to some extent (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). It is worth noting that such nomad and royal science have suitable and meaningful applications when they are used in certain situations and places (Casey, 1997). Otherwise, they may lose practical value and one could not work without the other’s support. This example might indicate that a place is essential for such nomad knowledge to become something real, which also needs many interactions or cooperation with abstract royal sciences at the same time (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Casey, 1997).

Within a place, each science usually operates in a “smooth” and/or a “striated” space, depending on its features (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Casey (1997) provided a detailed explanation of the differences between these two spaces. In a smooth space, most elements are flexible and heterogeneous with various qualitative features. Movement of elements in this space is also multiple without particularly fixed pathways. According to Casey (1997, p. 304), “smooth space provides room for vagabondage, for wandering and drifting between regions instead of moving straight ahead between fixed points”. Therefore, “one must continually find one’s way by determining the appropriate direction” (Casey, 1997, p. 306).

In contrast, in a striated space, elements usually move from one point to another by following “linear striation by precise paths” (Casey, 1997, p. 303). When social or natural elements move across different places, they not only follow certain “local operations”, for example, geometrical routes and proposed directions (in a striated space), but also have unexpected or unpredictable changes in

movements, depending on different circumstances (in a smooth space). Hence, movement occurs in a local place, but with dynamic and infinite changes between different spaces that have no clear boundaries. In this process, "local operations of reply must be oriented by the discovery (and often the continual rediscovery of direction); otherwise, these operations would be in vain" (Casey, 1997, p. 306).

To discover something new, nomads must experience a local place by "legwork" to explore that context. In this process, according to Casey (1997), such movement or exploration always immerses in between smooth and striated spaces across different places. Practically, these spaces are "not entirely independent of one another" (Casey, 1997, p. 308) and have many interactions with each other. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 474) suggested, "Smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space." Human activities always happen in between these spaces, but also in certain local places. Different features of spaces and places have indefinite influences on human activities as well. According to these explanations of the concepts of place and space, it is apparent that they are integrated but also have their particular focuses.

Under the growing trend of globalisation and with enhanced computational capacities, time, space and place have been compressed (Harvey, 1999; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). This trend motivates people to have an increasing awareness that the world seems to have become one place, as many aspects seem to be connected interactively and labelled by the concepts of "global" or "world", for example, global higher education or world economy (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). According to the above discussion about space and place, we might think that the trend of globalisation could make human activities and movements much more complex, which also are always accompanied by exploring different smooth and striated spaces across global places. As Amin (2002, p. 387) suggested, the increasing trend of globalisation in the contemporary world "might be interpreted as a spatial process elevating the tension between territorial relationships and transterritorial development". In this process, human and social elements are all positioned in a global networked space, along with complex changes through cross-system and cross-territory mobility and connection (Amin, 2002). In this networked space, everything becomes interdependent, but is mixed and connected through either visible or hidden ways, which could possibly combine "multiple spatialities of organisation and praxis as action and belonging at a distance" (Amin, 2002, p. 395). Notably, to some extent we might also

be able to argue that the new ICTs help us overcome this space/place distinction, at least to some extent, while acknowledging that face-to-face encounters still remain different from technologically mediated ones. This is Amin's central point that under the conditions of globalisation and with powerful computers the distinctions between space and place have been somewhat elided; as well, each place is now inextricably linked with other places through networked space. Through such a mixture and combination of different elements under the trend of globalisation and the development of ICTs, place and space are also restructured continuously. Human activities not only occur in certain local places, but also in different spatial contexts with more complicated situations, mainly through the use of substantial computational capacities (Amin, 2002).

Based on the differences between the place and space mentioned above, it is essential to discuss the potential distinctions between the two adjectives: third and in-between, mainly when they are used to describe a new space. According to Bhabha (1994), the third space could be seen as a unique and abstract concept to describe a unique context (e.g. C) that is independent from two other cultural and social systems (e.g. A and B). In the third space (C), people may develop their particular understanding or ideology, which leads to changes of identity as a third party different from but at the same time being connected with other systems (A and B). As a result, the third space may become highly independent. In contrast, the concept of in-between may emphasise the indeterminate position between two systems (A and B). In this in-between space, people continuously shift between A and B to find a suitable room for them to engage in cross-system communication and interaction, rather than remaining independent from these systems. In this case, they may not belong to A or B, but instead, belong to the "in-between shift". Furthermore, they may also not establish something entirely new as a third space (C) in their movement across different systems. In the process of in-between shifts, people move between different places. Meanwhile, they may also need to negotiate with different striated spaces and then have their own smooth space, which allows them to flexibly deal with cross-system differences as nomads, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms. In this process, different places, smooth and striated spaces are connected and combined together with people' constant (re)negotiations, which see these places and spaces as also being (re)shaped continuously (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

According to above discussion about theoretical differences and connections between space and places Chinese students studying in the 2+2 setting actually need to physically move from China

to Australia; yet at the same time, they remain connected across places through networked space. The 2+2 setting thus objectively positions students in different places, when compared with other more usual learning pathways that only need students to study in one country without such articulated collaboration. However, students may establish their individual spaces in the process of experiencing the change of places. Furthermore, they may face various issues in the transition and have different strategies to deal with the change of places. In this process, students may (re)shape their individual identity, agency, and belonging as a diaspora in the movement between different places and in the process of constructing individual spaces using ICTs. Such spaces might reflect their reactions to changes of places. These matters are the focus of this doctoral thesis.

Considering the learning space in higher education, it has become an essential aspect for researchers and educators to deeply understand, as it significantly influenced students' learning experiences and their engagements in university life (Matthews et al., 2011). With regard to the meaning of learning space, Savin-Baden et al. (2008) suggested that "there are diverse forms of spaces within the life and life world of the academic where opportunities to reflect and critique their own unique learning position occur" (p. 221). In a learning space, students usually realise that their understandings of learning, teaching, and identity "are being challenged" and "they have to make a decision about their own responses to such challenges" (Savin-Baden et al., 2008, p. 221). This statement could echo the reality that learning space usually creates a sophisticated platform for students to engage in the process of interactions with different tasks, which shapes their individual learning styles in particular educational settings (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). In a learning space, various factors could influence students' learning experiences, such as teaching strategies, assessment, and curriculum design (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Research related to the construction of learning space through multiple elements in a university context has become a vital field in higher education, yet is still under-researched (Ellis & Goodyear, 2016; Temple, 2008). Specifically, exploring the potential connections between the learning space and students' learning experiences, activities, and outcomes via qualitative interviews with different stakeholders (e.g. students and teacher) are important research directions in contemporary HE (Ellis & Goodyear, 2016). This is because understanding how these stakeholders make sense of their learning and teaching activities is significant for reflecting the quality of specific constructed learning space (Ellis & Goodyear, 2016).

Ellis and Goodyear (2016) proposed a rationale to explain why attention should be paid to the learning space. For instance, they argued that students' mobility results in universities are becoming more diverse and students also have more expectations of higher education, which means that the university context becomes much more complicated than before. Furthermore, with the rapid development and application of digital technologies, learning approaches become diverse as well, which compress time and space (Harvey, 1999). By adopting multiple technological tools, students could break the boundaries of learning and mix the physical place and virtual space depending on the individual requirements that they encounter.

Many researchers have investigated students' use of different digital technologies in different contexts (e.g. Corrin, Bennett, & Lockyer, 2010; Henderson, Selwyn, Finger, & Aston, 2015; Jones & Shao, 2011; Shao, 2012). For instance, Corrin et al. (2010) investigated approximately 550 Australian students' applications of Internet-based tools in their first-year daily life and study at an Australian university. They found that most students widely adopted various tools (e.g. desktop computer, mobile phone, and laptop) for life activities (e.g. sharing photos, chatting, and playing games), but they were not frequently used to support learning activities.

Similarly, by conducting a survey-based study that investigated approximately 2950 Chinese students' uses of Internet-based tools at a Chinese private university, Shao (2012) also found that most research participants generally made use of such tools for entertainment rather than learning purposes. It is interesting to note that along with the development of digital technologies, many students, who are considered as so-called "digital native" (Prensky, 2001), seem to be still outside the cycle of technology-assisted learning. It is worthwhile to examine what kinds of factors lead to the weak use of technology as learning mediation tools. Although many studies explore students' usage of digital technologies in different contexts respectively, limited studies have explored Chinese students' uses of Internet-based tools in a cross-system context, which may bring some new stories.

Last but not least, along with the construction of new complex learning spaces, various differences between countries, cultures, and societies potentially mean that education becomes fragmented, which requires educators to carefully consider how to manage these detailed disparities to help different students to achieve learning goals. Ellis and Goodyear (2016) suggested that to understand the issues of learning space, it is significant for researchers to explore students'

perspectives and investigate what kinds of variables play vital roles in shaping learning spaces, especially via interviewing and/or observing: what students actually do in complex learning spaces, how they make sense of their learning across different spaces, and what kinds of space they prefer to study in.

Based on the above analysis, it is apparent that learning in a 2+2 setting actually happens in a combined model which is established by different cultural, social, and educational features. Students, as key stakeholders, may have vivid learning trajectories with either shared or individual reactions to the cross-system setting. However, in the existing literature, as reviewed above, limited studies have investigated what kinds of learning spaces students experience their intercultural learning adjustment in 2+2 articulation programmes and how they make sense of themselves as learners in this space. Therefore, it is necessary to comprehensively explore Chinese students' learning in such a cross-cultural context and further illustrate their trajectories by adopting the existing theoretical models of intercultural learning/adjustment to reveal the essence of the learning space in the 2+2 setting. This is the focus of this doctoral research.

2.5 Conclusion

According to the above review of the literature, it is apparent that Chinese students' learning experiences in CFCRS programmes, for example, the 2+2 setting, might be more complex than other regular pathways for studying overseas. Based on the review, the following key gaps in the literature were identified. Generally, research in TNHE and CFCRS about Chinese students' learning experiences is still limited. Specifically, students' intercultural learning and adjustment issues are under-researched. In an attempt to give a voice to students, this research could further explore what kinds of learning space that 2+2 students engage in during their intercultural learning and adjustment processes. Specifically, current research lacks perspective from an in-betweener's experiences. In doing so, the researcher's individual experiences could become valuable to comparatively analyse potential research participants' learning stories. To explore these issues, as previous research indicates, students' experiences could be significant for indicating the quality of such programmes and revealing the values and problems that students may face during their study. Based on students' experiences, this study aims to add further valuable evidence and insights into current literature related to TNHE, CFCRS, and intercultural learning studies. In the next chapter, a detailed research plan and methodology will be outlined.

Chapter 3:

Methodology: Exploring Chinese students' learning experiences in 2+2 programmes

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the research methodology will be introduced in detail. Specifically, Creswell's (2009) methodological framework guided the choice of research paradigm and research design. There are three key steps in this framework: (1) positioning the research paradigm (or philosophical worldview), (2) selecting a suitable strategy of inquiry, and (3) choosing a useful and pertinent research method. In doing so, I first introduce the research paradigm to explain my ontological and epistemological positions in relation to the research problems as a researcher. Second, the research design is reported by comparing the differences between qualitative and quantitative inquiries. Here I aim to justify the appropriateness of adopting a qualitative study for exploring Chinese students' learning experiences in 2+2 articulation programmes. Third, the detailed research plan will be introduced, including: (1) research sites and participant's demographic information; (2) interview-based data collection approaches, procedures and the rationale for adopting such methods; (3) data analysis methods (e.g. inductive, deductive, and reflexivity), my position as a researcher in the analysis, and approach to presenting result (narrative as method). Furthermore, I will elucidate the ethical considerations that were carefully addressed in designing the research methods. In a concluding section of this chapter, the trustworthiness of the data collected and the limitations of the research design will be addressed.

3.2 Research Paradigm: Social Constructivist Perspective

The choice of a research paradigm influences the selection of inquiry type and data collection approaches. The theoretical definitions of a research paradigm have been widely discussed by academic scholars. For example, Punch (2009) defines it as "a set of assumptions about the world, and about what constitute proper techniques and topics for inquiring into that world" (p. 16). Put

simply, it also refers to a way of viewing the world, which indicates the philosophical worldview of researchers (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2005; Patton, 1990). Research paradigms differentiate ways of understanding how the "world is ordered, what we may know about it, and how we may know it" (Hatch, 2002, p. 11). They refer to different ontological views (what is the nature of reality), epistemological positions (what are the relationships between research subjects and the researcher and what are the bases of knowledge claims?), and methodological choices (how do I access research subjects' understandings of specific topics?) of a research study (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). The selection of a research paradigm reflects the "intent, motivation, and expectations for the research" (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006, para. 4). It is difficult for researchers to choose a research design, methodology, and method without considering the issues of the research paradigm (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

Research paradigms have different types. Based on Creswell's (2009) framework of philosophical worldviews, four types of paradigms are suggested, including postpositivism, social constructivism, advocacy and participatory, and pragmatism. In this study, a social constructivist worldview was adopted as the research paradigm to guide this research design. This paradigm emphasises the constructions of new knowledge based on communications and interactions between individuals and sociocultural contexts and knowledge making processes is dynamic, creative, and complex (Mertens, 2005). Hence, a social constructivist believes that there are various realities in nature and the world, rather than one specific and definitive truth (Creswell, 2007). Concerning these realities, people might have different views and understandings (Mertens, 2005). Therefore, it is necessary for researchers who wish to understand unknown knowledge of people's subjective experiences to investigate these sophisticated meanings from the perspectives of individuals who are engaging in these multiple activities by interacting with them (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2005).

As a researcher who adopts social constructivism as the research paradigm, the primary goal is to investigate and make sense of human understandings and experiences in specific situations about the world they live in (Mertens, 2005). Based on these theoretical foundations, I realise that learning experiences in 2+2 programmes are constructed by Chinese students who study in such particular settings. Therefore, it is worthwhile to explore how these students make sense of their 2+2 intercultural learning experiences via their own voices as primary data sources. By analysing participants' authentic experiences, researchers could interpret underlying meanings regarding their

intents, knowledge, and experiences (Creswell, 2007). In doing so, researchers could use qualitative inquiry to examine the particular cohort who is holding such knowledge and experiences (Creswell, 2009; Punch, 2009).

3.3 The strategy of Inquiry: Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative inquiry is adopted as a research approach in this study. According to Creswell (2009), those accepting a social constructivist paradigm usually utilise the qualitative approach for collecting data and for conducting the study that aims to explore and understand research participants' experiences and views toward a phenomenon or a problem that exists in their life. Qualitative inquiry focuses on investigating "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5).

Qualitative inquiry is different from the quantitative investigation. Quantitative research is often linked with positivism/post-positivism paradigms (Lincoln et al., 2011). This approach believes that there is an objective, static and measurable reality in nature and in the social world. Notably, quantitative research usually examines questions through evaluating the relationship among different variables that belong to specific theories (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Such research often requires large samples to obtain a wide range of data. Deductive methods are widely used to analyse quantitative data to test a proposed theory or hypothesis or examine the generalisation of research results. Quantitative inquiry drives researchers to collect data through survey instruments that can gather numerical results, which are measured and analysed statistically (Creswell, 2009). However, using such approaches makes it difficult for researchers to have a thorough understanding of participants' authentic experiences.

As discussed above, this study aims to obtain insightful meanings and understanding regarding Chinese students' learning experiences in China-Australia 2+2 programmes. Their actual experiences could help researchers to reveal the potential meanings towards the phenomenon or problem. The features of qualitative strategy align with the focus of this study. The qualitative paradigm requires researchers to communicate deeply with participants who actively engage in the particular activities being researched (Hatch, 2002). They could provide valuable experiences for interpreting the underlying meanings of such activities (Lichtman, 2006). As these features indicated,

a qualitative design could help me gain a series of insights about Chinese students' dynamic learning experiences as intercultural learners in such 2+2 programmes.

Qualitative inquiry allows researchers to collect naturalistic data that could reflect the research participants' original voices or unique views towards their experiences. Researchers could collect data in a natural setting, which could help them understand and interpret phenomena by utilising people's naturalistic expressions (Creswell, 2007). Researchers could naturally follow participants' emotions to explore their inner views. To explore and understand such experiences in a qualitative study, I could adopt different approaches as data collection methods. According to Creswell (2009), there are four methods in a qualitative study to gather data, including observations, interviews, questionnaires, and documents and audio-visual materials. In practice, researchers could use one or more approaches in data collection framed to some extent by the guiding research questions and aims (Creswell, 2009). In this study, individual interviews were adopted as the major approach to collect data as students' voices are the primary resources that reflect and illustrate their experiences. Before reporting the data collection procedure, information on research sites and participants will be discussed.

3.4 Research Sites and Participants

Three universities located in Brisbane, the capital city of Queensland, were selected as research sites. These universities are given a pseudonym respectively, including AU-1, AU-2, and AU-3. These three universities are all comprehensive institutions with both research and teaching focuses. Meanwhile, they have many international connections with different Chinese universities. Many Chinese students study in different majors and different levels at these universities. However, due to the specific academic period setting of 2+2 programmes and many restrictions (e.g. gatekeeper permission, time and funding), I was not able to track a group of students when they were studying in China. These students came from different Chinese universities so it was difficult to visit them when they were in China. Furthermore, it was not easy to recruit a large number of students in the same transnational programme in one university. Many factors led to this issue. For example, these students usually studied in Australia without a fixed class group as they have experienced in China. Furthermore, they are able to flexibly select courses based on individual interests and plans in Australia rather than always study in almost the same subjects with other peers, which usually happen

in the Chinese context. Therefore, I recruited students from different universities pursuing different courses to enhance the data diversity.

A purposive sampling approach was used to recruit research participants. Purposive sampling is usually utilised in the qualitative study and focuses on recruiting particular participants who can provide data that will assist in answering the specific research questions that framed the study (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The research subjects are Chinese students in China-Australia 2+2 programmes. Therefore, selecting participants who have suitable backgrounds and related experiences relevant to my study would help me in answering the framing research questions. I recruited participants in Australia through Chinese student associations and personal networks from April to June 2015. When the ethical committee approved the application of a data collection plan, I contacted managing representatives of Chinese student associations in the proposed three Australian universities to recruit participants.

To gather participants in an expedient way, I set up three online discussion groups, one for each university, through a social networking application, WeChat. The WeChat is a Chinese social networking application, and it allows people to chat with each other in individual or group settings. It has become one of the most popular online communication applications in China. Then, potential participants were invited to join the WeChat group depending on the university that they were studying in. Finally, a total of 45 students joined: 10 in the AU-1 group, 20 in the AU-2 group, and 15 in the AU-3 group. After gathering the potential participants, first, I introduced the study and my personal background to each WeChat group to let these potential participants have an initial sense of the study and the researcher. Then, I distributed invitations and consent forms through WeChat groups to request students who were interested in my study to participate in my research project. Although I recruited 45 students in these universities, many students did not actually participate in the study due to various issues (e.g. learning schedule, individual interests, health issues, and heavy study workload).

Consequently, twelve students voluntarily participated in the individual interview sessions. Considering privacy issues, I gave each participant an English name as a pseudonym for this study, including six males (Shuoshuo, Haohao, Jiufu, Qihao, Dongdong, and Qianqian) and six females

(Yuner, Gaogao, Baobao, Jiaojiao, Dengdeng, and Lamei). Their ages ranged from 20 to 25 years old. Table 1 provides an overview of selected characteristics of individual interviewees.

Table 3. 1 Demographic information of individual interview participants

Students	Gender	Years in Australia	Fields of major (study)	Australian university
Qihao	Male	1	Business-related	AU-3
Yuner	Female	1	Business-related	AU-1
Gaogao	Female	1	Design-related	AU-2
Jiaojiao	Female	1	Education	AU-1
Baobao	Female	2	Design-related	AU-2
Qianqian	Male	2	Business-related	AU-1
Lamei	Female	2	Engineering-related	AU-1
Haohao	Male	2	Engineering-related	AU-3
Dengdeng	Female	2	Design-related	AU-2
Shuoshuo	Male	2	Business-related	AU-1
Dongdong	Male	Graduated	Design-related	AU-2
Jiufu	Male	Graduated	Design-related	AU-2

Having participants who studied in different stages of their Australian periods could reflect multiple views and experiences about students' learning journeys. For instance, Yuner was in her first year of study in Australia. She came to Australia in 2015 and she studied in a Business-related field. Her Chinese university was a regional based teaching-focused university that has specific focuses on Finance and Business education. It is located in Jinan, the capital city of Shandong province, which is in the north-east coast area of China. This province has a developed economy compared to most other areas of China and it is the hometown of Confucius. Her programme can awards two degrees from the Chinese and the Australian universities respectively when she complete the four years of study. Notably, after coming to Australia, she studied in a university located in Brisbane, the capital city of Queensland State. The Australian university is a research-based comprehensive institution. When studying in Australia, Yuner realised that there were many differences between Chinese and Australian education modes, for example, teaching strategies. However, Yuner felt uncomfortable in Australia as she preferred the previous style in China. She had negative attitudes towards study in Australia. She wished to go back to China after graduation even though the Australian university has a strong reputation.

As a participant who was in the second year of studying in Australia, Shuoshuo came to Australia in 2014 and he studied Accounting and Finance. His Chinese university was also located in Shandong province but in another city, Qingdao, which is one of the most economically developed cities in China. The Chinese university that Shuoshuo studied at is a regional teaching-focused comprehensive institution. His programme also can award a Chinese and Australia degrees for students. In Australia, Shuoshuo also studied in a research-focused comprehensive university located in Brisbane. Generally, he seemed to be not very satisfied with his Chinese learning period, but he enjoyed the Australian university and context. Considering the Chinese stage, he was not an active learner as the general academic styles and atmospheres were not suitable for his study. However, he did not want to be profoundly influenced by this context anymore and made many changes after coming to Australia. He adopted more positive attitudes towards his study and realised the dangers of failures in the exam. Therefore, he started to make changes to his learning strategies to catch up to the Australian requirements and to adjust to the new environment.

Notably, as an extraordinary example, Haohao changed his major during his 2+2 journey. When he participated in this study, he was studying in his second year in Australia. He came to Australia in 2015 and studied Electrical Engineering in Australia. However, he has studied in business-related subjects at a Chinese university that is also located in Qingdao, Shandong province. His Chinese university is also a regional teaching based institution without a strong research focus. When he came to Australia, his university was also a regionally based institution, even though it has some research focuses. Notably, his programme only can award one Australian degree without the Chinese one. If students change majors after coming to Australia, they still can obtain the Australian degree but they may need to take more times than proposed two years in Australia to complete study in the new major. Generally, his experiences reflected a positive story in terms of the transnational study. He suggested that in China, learning means going to classrooms, listening to the lecturers, remembering critical chapters of textbooks, and passing exams. Even though his university arranged some foreign lecturers and visiting students to communicate with them, there was limited assistance to enable him to benefit from this experiences. When he came to Australia, he changed his major to Electric Engineering, which was his preferred major. Therefore, he restarted his learning journey and paid more attention to study.

Similar to Haohao, Jiaojiao also changed her major from Business-related subjects to Education. Her programme has the similar setting with Haohao's one that only can award one degree from the Australian university. Hence, when she selected to study in Education, she actually restarted her learning in order to gain a new degree. Before coming to Australia in 2015, Jiaojiao was studying in a university located in Hangzhou, the capital city of Zhejiang province, which is also an economically developed area in China. Her Chinese university is also a regional based teaching based institution, rather than intensively research focused. In contrast, she studied in one of the research-based universities in Brisbane when she came to Australia. During the data collection, I found that she was an active and loquacious girl who has clear individual learning goals and further plans. To follow individual learning interests, she wanted to be a teacher because she preferred to communicate with people rather than doing the kind of work (e.g. Finance) that has become over-popular in China. Although she changed majors, she felt familiar with an English-based teaching context and Australian learning mode as her Chinese university used the same teaching strategies as did the Australian university (e.g. lecture-tutorial). Such learning experiences in China also helped Jiaojiao to adjust to the Australian setting. Even though she had some difficulties in studying a new major, she reflected a positive attitude to overcome problems. Having Haohao and Jiaojiao as research participants provided a unique perspective on learning through 2+2 setting. Their experiences suggested that not all students studied in their original majors in the 2+2 learning setting and different 2+2 programmes may have dramatically different policies that allow students to change their learning pathways and majors. Some of them may start their undergraduate study by enrolling in a 2+2 programme but they may make changes during the learning process depending on individual situations.

As one of those who graduated from the 2+2 programme, Dongdong seemed to be a successful example as he got a job offer in Australia even before completing his study. Dongdong started his Australian learning stage in 2013 after completing the Chinese stage in a university located in Jinan, Shandong province. His Chinese university is an Art-Design specific institution with a strong teaching focus. His programme can award a Chinese and Australian degrees when students complete the four years of study. When he came to Australia, he started to study in a language school at his university because his IELTS did not reach the language requirement for directly starting discipline study. The Australian university he studied at is located in Brisbane as well. It is also a regional based institution with more of a teaching focus. His major was Digital Design in China and he kept studying

in a similar field, which is called Digital Media, after coming to Australia. Dongdong is a highly-expressive student and he specifically shared his experiences of using ICTs in learning, teaching strategies, and knowledge that was consistent in the transition from China to Australia. With regard to the overview of the 2+2 programme and learning experience, he was satisfied with his journey as the programme allowed him to experience different educational settings.

According to these examples, it is apparent that although these participants' experiences could not be generalised to all students' views, their interviews would most likely reflect multiple learning experiences to show different possibilities and situations of learning in 2+2 programmes. In the following section, I will introduce the detailed method and procedure of data collection.

3.5 Research Design

3.5.1 A case study based qualitative inquiry.

In respect of qualitative study, there are five approaches to address research questions from different perspectives, including narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study (Creswell, 2003). In this inquiry, case study was adopted to explore Chinese students' learning experiences in 2+2 programmes. According to Merriam (1998) and R. Yin (2014), in applied social science research, for example, education, to answer "how" questions is likely to use case study design, which aims to explain and examine contemporary events.

The case study has various definitions. For instance, Eisenhardt (1989) suggested that "the case study is a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings." (p. 534). Moreover, Merriam (1998) identified that a case study is an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or a social unit." (p. 27). Furthermore, R. Yin (2014) considered a case study as "an empirical inquiry" (p. 16). However, in detail, he claimed that a case study aims to understand "a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 16). Through these definitions, it is obvious that the primary goal of a case study is to help researchers to investigate and demonstrate specific events that happen in relation to a purposeful group of people. By using a case study, educational researchers can document and understand the performance, experience and feelings of research participants in a particular situation (Cohen et al., 2007).

Given the research field of this study, many scholars (e.g. Adam & Nel, 2009; Gao et al., 2012; Ku & Lohr, 2003; Mok & Xu, 2008) have utilised case study design as an effective strategy to address their questions and make contributions to the field of intercultural learning and TNHE. For example, Gao et al. (2012) attempted to demonstrate the development, benefits and challenges of joint programmes in China. Within the holistic context of Chinese articulation programmes, they selected a China-Australia programme as the research unity to conduct a case study inquiry. Furthermore, Thompson and Ku (2005) conducted a case study research to explore seven educational major Chinese students' online learning experiences in the transition from China to the United States. In this case study, they conducted several in-depth interviews to examine research participants' perceptions of learning in an ICT-assisted context via comparing their experiences in China with those in the US. As a result, they found that most participants preferred study through an Internet-based learning mode, which combines online learning and face-to-face communication. These examples suggest that case study is suitable to explore research participants' authentic views of their lived experiences from a qualitative perspective (R. Yin, 2014). Furthermore, a case study can help researchers to illustrate people's journeys and stories in a real context that they engage in across their daily life, work, and study (R. Yin, 2014).

By contrast, several weaknesses of the case study approach can also influence the quality, validity and reliability of the study. Cohen et al. (2007) mentioned that the research results of a single case study might be biased and not be generalizable because the views of researchers may be impressionistic. To overcome these shortcomings, many researchers established new approaches, for example: multi-case study or multisite study (Merriam, 1998; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009; R. Yin, 2014). The term "multi" implies the core of this particular design. A multi-case study design means that a researcher proposes to investigate two or more subjects, settings or other relevant data by using a case study strategy (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Through multi-case study, the analysis of research findings may be more potent than those insights derived from a single case study (R. Yin, 2014). Moreover, a multi-case study can also provide different perspectives to researchers who may find other unpredicted and unexpected results (Merriam, 1998; R. Yin, 2014).

In this study, I adopted a multiple case study design to address the proposed research questions. As mentioned above, research participants came from four different 2+2 programmes. Each programme is seen as a case of articulation programmes. Compared to studies (e.g. F. Wang et al.,

2016; H. Yang & Lesser, 2017) that mainly focused on a single programme, this study could access multiple cases via recruiting students who studied in different 2+2 programmes. Furthermore, each student is an individual who may have various experiences and views towards intercultural learning and adjustment. Therefore, they also can be seen as individual cases in this study. To investigate students' lived experiences and their perceptions in the 2+2 learning processes, I utilised interview as data collection approach.

3.5.2 In-depth interview as data collection approach.

Individual interviews were used to investigate Chinese students' experiences of studying in 2+2 programmes across two different HE contexts. The essence of experience is social, which is based on "contact and communication" (Dewey, 1963, p. 38). In doing so, it is important to communicate with students to understand their experiences. According to Mears (2012, p. 170), individual interviews are:

> …purposeful interactions in which an investigator attempts to learn what another person knows about a topic, to discover and record what that person has experienced, what he or she thinks and feels about it, and what significance or meaning it might have.

Notably, interviewing individuals allows researchers to "follow up unexpected results, or to validate other methods, or to go deeper into the motivation of respondents and their reason for responding as they do" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 351). Therefore, the case study could provide "insightful analysis and produce defensible findings" for researchers (Mears, 2012, p. 171). As Seidman (2006) emphasised, research interviews seek to understand "the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). Explicitly, I adopted semi-structured interviews to collect data. The semi-structured style allows me not only to follow a guide to conduct interviews, but also to ask further questions based on the different situations and issues that arise in research conversations (Bryman, 2016). Depending on the situation of the interview and interviewees' responses, I could also ask probing questions that were not included in the guide list.

A series of open-ended questions were designed based on the literature review and the research questions that guided the study. Influenced by the idea of a "three steps interview approach" proposed by Seidman (2006), I designed questions that helped me to understand students' previous

Chinese stories, presented Australian experiences, and their views concerning the 2+2 learning. Seidman (2006) suggested that interviewing participants with three different focuses will facilitate comprehensive investigation of interviewees' experiences. Specifically, in the first round interview, researchers should focus on exploring data related to participants' life or learning history, which could help them to understand interviewees' backgrounds (Seidman, 2006). Then, in the second round interview, researchers start to investigate "participants' present lived experiences in the topic area of the study" (Seidman, 2006, p. 18). Finally, the third round interview aims to investigate participants' reflections on the meaning of their experiences. In this stage of an interview, "participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation in detail within the context in which it occurs" (Seidman, 2006, p. 18).

However, in practice, due to interviewees' individual situations, many of them were not able to participate in three interviews. Therefore, I conducted one interview with each participant, which covered the three aspects of their experiences. Following Seidman's (2006) interview guidance was a useful and logical way to plan interview sequences and design questions with a systematic approach. Each section has tight connections with the others, which allows researchers to not only focus on the fundamental research topics, but also to be able to gain more instantaneous information during the interviewing process.

Specifically, in the first part of the interview, a series of warm-up questions related to their study and life history was asked to help me to know more about their first two years experiences in the Chinese context and establish close relationships with interviewees. For example, "Would you introduce yourself?"; "How did you study in the Chinese context?" The second section seeks to explore the detailed and ongoing experiences of learning via the 2+2 programme from China to Australia, especially as intercultural learners in the Australian context. For instance, "Would you talk about how you studied in Australia?" The third part focused on understanding their reflections about the intercultural learning in the 2+2 programme. In this section, questions related to students' views about their learning surroundings were asked, which aimed to help me make sense of their complex and dynamic learning journeys. For instance, "How do you think of the role of ICTs in your Chinese and Australian learning stages?" According to Seidman (2006), it is necessary to know the interactions between interviewees and other factors in their lived context as they interweave and make the experiences meaningful. Therefore, in this section, questions were mainly about students' views

towards other factors around them, such as lecturers and peers, technology, and university contexts. The finalised interview schedule is included in Appendix 4.

After creating the interview questions, I discussed them with my advisors to gain their views on the questions in relation to the purposes of the research study. Then, based on their suggestions, I made some revisions. They further suggested that it was necessary to test or pilot these questions before starting the formal interviews. Therefore, I conducted three mock interviews in August 2015. The primary reason for conducting the mock interviews was to examine whether the semi-structured style and proposed questions would help me to obtain useful and meaningful data and help me answer my research questions. Three 2+2 students voluntarily participated in the mock interviews. They were all final year students but studied in different majors, two in Business-related and one in Design-related courses. These students in the Business-related major came from the AU-1, and the one in Design-related was studying at AU-2. Mock interviews took 45 minutes to 1 hour. All interviews were voice recorded and conducted in Chinese because this enabled these students to talk about their experiences explicitly without language barriers.

Based on my initial analysis of these interviews, I discussed the potential issues with my supervisors to further seek their advice. They gave many valuable suggestions. For example, it was necessary to ask questions about students' motivations to study in such a programme, which could be used as a point to start the interview. Based on their suggestions, I revised some questions. Considering the time duration of the interview, I realised that interviewees might need more time to provide in-depth information, which means that 45 up to 1 hour was not enough for them to answer all questions in depth. Therefore, I proposed extending the interview time from 1 to 1.5 hours. Finally, my advisors agreed with the semi-structured style and proposed questions. Therefore, I started the formal interview sessions. Notably, the data collected in the mock interviews were not used in the data analysis and these students did not participate in the subsequent research.

I conducted the formal individual interviews from February to April 2016. All interviews were done in a face-to-face mode, which is because this method could help researchers to have more close communications with interviewees. Importantly, researchers can have more sensitive understandings when they can see the interviewees (Cohen et al., 2007). Therefore, I visited the interviewees in two places: universities, or their homes. These places usually had safe and peaceful environments, which

could ensure the quality of interviews. All conversations were in Chinese as using interviewees' native language can let them present their thinking and ideas without language barriers. Meanwhile, I used a digital voice recorder to record interview audios and transferred each interview to the online cloud drives to back them up in order to avoid losing data.

Before each interview, I gave interviewees an information sheet (Appendix 2) and consent form (Appendix 3) to let them read and sign to ensure they gave informed consent to their participation in the study and to understand how the interview would be conducted. After getting permission from the students, I started the interview. First, I introduced myself, the research project, study aims, and interviewees' rights to withdraw from the study. Through the introduction section, I wished to establish trust with interviewees and to motivate their expectations of presenting learning experiences, which could improve the quality of collected data. Then, I started to ask opened-questions and to slightly add probing questions depending on the students' responses. During each interview, I also took notes on my notebook to highlight the key points mentioned by interviewees. These notes helped me to recall the relevant content reported by interviewees during the data analysis. The duration of interviews was approximately from 1 to 1.5 hours depending on different students.

It is worth noting that as I was a former 2+2 student, my previous learning experiences helped me understand research participants' experiences. In this case, I was an insider in relation to this particular group. In contrast, I was also an outsider during each interview session. To ensure that participants were able to share their stories without any outside influences (e.g. my views towards 2+2 learning), I tried to avoid interrupting them in interviews. Meanwhile, when I heard exciting stories, I also took notes, which helped me recall my experiences as reflexive resources in the process of writing my research diaries. If necessary, I also tried to interact with research participants via asking several probing questions, when I noticed that some of their stories were notably different from what I experienced in my own programme. In this case, I could gain some unique stories from my participants and also compare their experiences with mine, which helped me to critically and comparatively examine different learning features between them and me in different 2+2 programmes.

Most students had active attitudes and really wanted to share their stories. Lamei is the only one who came from a top-ranked research based Chinese university, located in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei Province in the middle of China. This city has the most significant number of university

students in the world and has approximately 100 different levels of higher education institutions. Her programme can award two degrees for students. She came to Australia in 2015 and studied Electrical Engineering. Her Australian university is also a research-focused institution in Australia. She indicated strong motivations to achieve high academic scores and also wished to apply for PhD study after graduation. Meanwhile, she experienced various changes in learning. By adjusting her learning strategies and attitudes, Lamei felt that she could quickly adapt to the Australian context even though she experienced many barriers. Interestingly, she summarised her 2+2 learning experiences by using one sentence: "I learn how to play in China, I learn how to study in Australia."

Similarly, Gaogao reflected a dynamic story. She was doing her first year of study at her Australian university when she participated in the interview. She came from Shandong province as well and started her Australian study in 2015. Her major in the 2+2 programme was Digital Design, which is the same major and programme as Dongdong. She did not change it after coming to the Australian university. When I contacted her, Gaogao showed positive attitudes in respect of participating in this study. In her interview, although she reported a series of differences in teaching and learning between China and Australia, she identified that the course contents of the Chinese stage had tight connections and consistencies with the Australian stage. Furthermore, she became an explorer and made use of ICTs as learning mediation to help her develop skills and knowledge more independently and autonomously. She preferred to study in the Australian context and wished to stay in Australia.

However, some interviewees participated less enthusiastically in the research interview. For instance, Qihao was not active during the interview compared to some participants. Qihao started his Australian learning stage in 2015 after completing his Chinese stage at a university located in Wuhan, Hubei province. His Chinese university is not ranked as a top research university in China and it mainly focuses on teaching Business-related majors. His programme can also award two degrees for students. He studied in a Business-field major at the Australian university. When I met him at university, he was not very cooperative as we did not know each other before. Generally, he had negative attitudes towards his 2+2 learning experiences. Even though he realised the changes in learning contexts and barriers he faced, he did not represent a strong desire to study.

Furthermore, some respondents presented many specific experiences that spurred me on to know more about them. In these cases, I did not interrupt interviewees and let them talk in detail. Therefore, some interviews took more than 1.5 hours compared to the proposed plan. For instance, Jiufu seemed to be sensitive to the interview initially as he was wondering if I would give his recording to somebody else. To dispel his concerns, I explained my strategies for saving the data and promised that I would not give his interview recording to the people who he was worried about. Interestingly, when he knew that I had had similar experiences to his as a former 2+2 student from the same programme, Jiufu felt much more relaxed as he wished to have opportunities to express his negative attitudes.

Jiufu completed his study in the 2+2 programme in December 2015 and he studied in a Digital Design major. He was also studying in the same programme with Gaogao, Dengdeng and Dongdong but they were not in the same class. Jiufu identified himself as a "successful" student in the Chinese stage. However, he became de-motivated in learning after coming to Australia due to various barriers to study, such as language, teaching and learning strategies, and peers' relationships. Jiufu started his Australian stage in studying English as he did not satisfy the IELTS requirement. This period seemed to be an adventure in his transitional study. He experienced bouts of loneliness and moments of hardship to adjust his learning strategies and attitudes in Australia as English could be still a major barrier for him. Although he has completed his 2+2 programme, he still needed to study in a master level course to obtain an advanced degree. During his interview, I noticed that his parents wanted him to obtain a Master degree after completing his 2+2 programme, which made him feel it was difficult to reach this goal especially when he was immersed in a situation of passively dealing with cross-system differences.

Compared to Jiufu's experiences, Qianqian seemed to be neutral towards 2+2 learning. Qianqian came from Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong province, which is located in the south part of China. He started his 2+2 programme from 2013 in a regional teaching-based university located in Guangzhou. His programme allows students to have two degrees after completing the Australian learning stages. After passing IELTS, he came to Australia in 2015 and studied in Accounting and Finance, which were the same learning focuses as the Chinese stage. His Australian university was a research-based institution with a comprehensive research focus. Qianqian's experiences indicated that he had strong negative views and attitudes towards his Chinese learning

stage. In the research interview, he suggested that he was inactive and seemed not interested in learning. When he discussed his Australian experiences, he reported many changes which could be considered as positive views, when compared with his Chinese experiences. Considering the general view of his 2+2 learning experience, he indicated that it was acceptable but not very good.

At the end of each interview, I also asked these students to provide feedback regarding the research interview section and the research study. Most interviewees believed this study was interesting and worthwhile because they had an opportunity to present their authentic experiences of learning in the 2+2 settings, for example, Baobao. After completing two years of study at her Chinese university, Baobao came to Australia in 2015. Her programme was run by a regional teaching-based university for Art-Design education, which is located in Jinan, Shandong Province. Her programme was the same as the one that Jiufu, Gaogao, and Dongdong studied in. She was studying Digital Media in China and then she selected a similar major, which was named as Digital Design, at her Australian university. Baobao believed that joining this doctoral study could be an excellent opportunity for her to reflect and review her learning journey. As she argued, few people paid attention to listening to students' voices regarding learning issues in 2+2 programmes. Therefore, Baobao wished to join the study and she shared various experiences regarding her learning, which indicated her deep understanding and reflections of the transitional study.

Similarly, Dengdeng also felt that it was worthwhile to express her experiences via this study. Her programme was the same as the one that Baobao, Jiufu, Gaogao, and Dongdong studied in but they were not all in the same class. She came to Australia in 2014 to start her last two years of study. Her major was Digital Design and she studied in the same discipline in Australia. As she did not pass IELTS in China, she learned English first and then started her discipline study. However, she seemed to feel it was difficult to engage in learning in the initial stage at the Australian university. After studying in the new context for a period of time, she started to enjoy the new environment. In this process, Dengdeng indicated both positive and negative views toward her 2+2 study. Meanwhile, she pinpointed some issues about the cross-system teaching and learning strategies, content consistency, and ICTs applications. Generally, Dengdeng critically evaluated her 2+2 programme and she seemed to enjoy her intercultural learning process.

According to the above introduction, as many participants indicated, through participating in this study, they wished to present their multiple views to let other stakeholders (e.g. university, educators, other students, and even policy makers) know their real and practical learning experiences. After completing the data collection, I started to analyse the data by using different approaches.

3.5.3 Data analysis and procedures: Inductive and deductive approaches.

The process of analysing qualitative data is a form of interaction between the researcher and specific interpretation of the issues that the research study focuses on (Cohen et al., 2007). Qualitative analysis is a process of "organising, accounting for and explaining the data; in short, making sense of data regarding the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 461). Furthermore, Cohen et al. (2007) pinpointed that there are plenty of approaches to analysing qualitative data without a single process or method. Depending on the research aims and questions, researchers could analyse data by adopting either inductive methods without analytical structures (grounded theory), or deductive approaches adhering to and utilising theoretical frameworks (Cohen et al., 2007), which also can be utilised together with qualitative data analysis to explore potential findings from different perspectives (Creswell, 2007).

To analyse and understand students' sensemaking stories in depth, I adopted both deductive and inductive approach. Based on my initial understanding of my research topic and students' interviews, I formulated some questions to guide my analysis, for example, are these 2+2 students' intercultural learning experiences aligned with other research findings? Can other theoretical models explain their 2+2 learning experiences? To address these questions, I inductively ("bottom-up") analysed the interview data first and then deductively ("top-down") interrogated the meanings of this data using others' theoretical lens (e.g. Gill's (2007) transformative learning framework). Through the mixed applications of inductive and deductive analyses, I critically analysed my interview data in order to seek potential answers to illustrate a comprehensive picture of my participants' 2+2 learning experiences.

In the process of inductive analysis, I adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach to identify potential key themes found in the data. Specifically, Braun and Clarke (2006) introduce six steps of conducting a thematic analysis, including (1) becoming familiar with the data; (2) create initial codes; (3) search potential themes; (4) review themes; (5) define and name themes;

(6) produce results. In the deductive analysis, I analysed the interview data along with reflectivity in respect of my individual 2+2 learning experiences and interaction with Gill's (2007) transformative learning framework. Based on the strategies above, I started to analyse the data.

The first step is to be familiar with the collected data. Therefore, it is necessary to transcribe the audio recorded data into texts. To have a general understanding of the collected data, I decided to transcribe the recordings myself. Through this process, I could become much more familiar with the contents and also recall various vital moments during the data collection. I took one month to transcribe all recordings into texts in Chinese. Listening to the Chinese recordings and transcribing them in Chinese ensured that I developed a holistic and clear understanding of the collected data without language barriers. After transcribing data from recording to texts, I started to translate Chinese into English. This process was very time-consuming, but also was necessary for further data analysis. I took approximately two months to complete the whole process. To enhance the accuracy and quality of the translation, I also listened to the recording repeatedly and double checked the transcriptions.

To improve the quality of the translation, I invited a friend to help me transcribe and translate a series of interviews. As a PhD graduate student, she is a native Chinese speaker and also had professional experience of doing qualitative research in English. Therefore, her suggestions proved helpful to me to improve the quality of the translation. She helped me to check three copies of translations by comparing the Chinese and English transcriptions. Based on her suggestions, I identified that it was necessary to use the same vocabulary across the translation. For example, I used Internet-based technology in one document. However, she used information and communication technology in another document. Although I wished to present the same meaning of technology in learning, the language differences made it slightly different. Therefore, I revised such language issues throughout the translation. Although I have become familiar with the collected data after transcribing and translating recordings, it was also necessary for me to systematically read the final documents. Through reading and re-reading data, I noticed the differences and similarities between each student's responses after reading their transcriptions. In this process, I considered possible ways of coding this data.

The second step was to code data. I coded interview transcriptions by hand via the assistance of Microsoft Word, which allowed me to flexibly manage, code, and change transcriptions based on my needs and preferences. Then, I also started with reading each interview transcription line by line even though I had read them several rounds before inductively analysing data. During reading, I used multiple colours to highlight different sections, sections, words, and phrases, which provoked me to think about students' learning experiences critically. To clearly view and compare coded data, I created tables in Microsoft Word to list codes and possible categories for each transcription. During the process of coding data, I also compared different students' interview transcriptions in order to have a critical understanding of the general picture of participants' learning experiences and particular points that some students shared. This process could help me search and find multiple potential themes based on interview data. Specifically, some extracts indicate multiple meanings, so I coded them into different categories several times in order to ensure the accuracy of data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An example of the coded data and an explanation of the coding process are provided in Appendix 5.

To ensure the accuracy of coding, I invited two of my colleagues to code one transcript. Then I compared three copies to cross-check the differences. We were studying in the same school and we were all PhD students. One of them was also doing a qualitative study, and another student was doing a mixed method study. They both had experiences in analysing and coding qualitative data. Generally, these copies showed similar outcomes of codes. However, some issues emerged from comparing different codes. For instance, one student coded all information related to technology together without sorting out them in further details. Another student and I coded the contents that were related to students' usages of technology as ICTs in learning. This difference indicated that when people coded the same data, their views on a similar term could be very different. It was necessary to consider the context of transcripts and then determine the coding strategies. To deal with this issue, I discussed these matters with my colleagues and advisors. Finally, we all agreed with the method of coding the data into more detailed layers rather than putting them into a general category.

Through these analyses, I tried to put coded data into different categories, which can help me comprehensively understand data and logically find potential interconnections between different ideas and meanings emerged from students' learning experiences. Based on Walter's (2013) suggestion, these categories can be regarded as the themes. Initially, a total of sixteen categories

emerged from students' interviews. According to Creswell (2012), themes mean that "similar codes aggregated together to form a major idea in the data" (p. 248). However, due to the research focuses and aims, I narrowed them down into seven major themes, which include changes to agency, identity, and belonging as 2+2 learners, the use of ICTs in learning, teaching strategies, assessment modes, and university academic culture. These themes captured the key patterns of these students' sensemaking processes of intercultural learning experiences from various perspectives.

After determining these themes, I deductively reviewed the data based on Gill's (2007) transformative learning framework. Gill's framework suggests that students usually experience three stages in their intercultural learning adjustment: "stressful start; adaptation; development as independent". Through reading interview transcriptions many times, I tried to find extracts relating to each stage of Gill's (2007) framework. For instance, when I saw data that indicated stressful meanings in the initial stage of intercultural adjustment, I highlighted it in one colour. Then data related to students' adjustment approaches and their development were coloured differently. Finally, I comparatively examined each student' data and then conducted a cross-case analysis to seek the potential similarities and differences between the interview data. During this process, I noticed that some of their experiences indicated similar processes of learning in their 2+2 programmes. In contrast, some students did reflect more complex experiences. Therefore, it was necessary to adopt a special approach to illustrate students' multiple and dynamic 2+2 learning experiences. By analysing students' learning experiences, I summarised the key features of each research participants, which has been shown in Table 3.2. Detailed analysis and additional information will be provided in Chapter 4.

Table 3. 2 Summary of features of participants' learning in 2+2 transition

Respondent	Preliminary Insight/s
Yuner	Desires of going back to China
Shuoshuo	Enjoyed the Australian experience
Haohao	Re-starting the learning journey in Australia
Jiaojiao	Adjustment to Australian learning mode with a positive attitude
Dongdong	Satisfied with different educational settings with critical reflections
Lamei	Adaptable learner
Gaogao	Explorer whilst studying
Qihaoe	De-motivated learner facing barriers
Jiufu	Facing loneliness and hardship
Qianqian	Lacklustre attitude towards study
Baobao	Eager to share the learning experience with positive learning experiences in general
Dengdeng	Enjoyed study experience in Australia but experienced many barriers with multiple attitudes towards each educational setting

3.5.4 My position in the data analysis: A researcher "in between", an outsider and an insider.

The role of the researcher has been widely discussed as one of the methodological debates in qualitative research and international education (e.g. Arthur, 2010; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Milligan, 2016; Savvides, Al-Youssef, Colin, & Garrido, 2016). Specifically, the concept of insider and outsider is one of the primary focuses in such arguments (Hellawell, 2006; Merton, 1972; Milligan, 2016). For example, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) systematically reviewed and compared these different roles in qualitative studies. The concept of insider refers to the researcher who has similar (or prior) experiences or characteristics with research participants (Merton, 1972). For the outsider, it is apparent that the researcher usually does not share similar (or prior) experiences with participants (Merton, 1972).

To position the researcher in either role in research has its advantages and disadvantages. For instance, as an insider, the researcher could be profoundly affected by his/her similar experiences with participants. In contrast, when the researcher investigated an issue as an outsider of the study field or had limited experiences of the topic being researched, it might be difficult for the researcher to genuinely comprehend participants' stories.

My position in relation to this study is particular in that I had experienced what I was researching and was in a sense, an insider. As a researcher who had a 2+2 learning experience, I started my 2+2 programme in 2007. From 2007 to 2009, I was studying in a Chinese university which was located in Jinan, Shandong province. My university was an Art-Design focused teaching institution that provided many 2+2 programmes with multiple international partners (e.g. Australia, the United States of America, Russia, and South Korea). I was admitted into the China-Australia programme. After reaching the IELTS requirement (average 6 or above) in 2009, I transferred to the Australian university that was a research-teaching focused, comprehensive institution and started my last two years of study. My major was in Digital Design, which provided me with experiences similar to those of some of the students in my research. After completing the 2+2 programme, I completed my research degree and achieved first class honours, which helped me to obtain a PhD offer to conduct my current research study.

On the one hand, it is apparent that my experiences had various similarities with my participants as we all studied in 2+2 settings in either the same or different programmes or universities. In this case, when I interviewed them, I was able to quickly understand what they shared as I experienced many similar learning barriers and processes as what they had. Hence, investigating their 2+2 learning experiences potentially provided an opportunity for me to recall my experiences and also spontaneously to compare mine and their stories. In this situation, I could be considered as an insider.

On the other hand, I could also be considered as an outsider in the study. Although I had similar learning pathways and cultural backgrounds with my participants, many differences (e.g. time and spatial, programmes and majors, and even sociocultural developments) influenced our 2+2 experiences. Hence, when I interviewed the students, I actually was also outside of their contexts as I did not know how they experienced learning in a 2+2 programme and how they thought of themselves as 2+2 learners. This unique position reflected an issue of shifting researcher's roles in the study.

However, it is essential for researchers to reflect on their different identities during the conduct of their research (Hellawell, 2006). Various researchers (e.g. Arthur, 2010; Hellawell, 2006; Merton, 1972; Milligan, 2016) have argued that the traditional perspectives of insider and outsider should be

reconsidered and re-theorised. Notably, Merton (1972) revealed that researchers could have fluid identities in a research project depending on different situations, which creates a series of statuses rather than merely one status as either an insider or an outsider. Such mixed positions are a set of identities (Merton, 1972). Along with Merton's debates, Hellawell (2006) and Arthur (2010) suggested that researchers' position should not be considered as a single role. Based on these previous arguments, more recently, Milligan (2016) pinpointed a new concept of in-betweener to reconceptualise the role of researchers in cross-cultural and international research. As an in-betweener, a researcher "can make active attempts to place themselves in between" (Milligan, 2016, p. 248). Importantly, an in-betweener can have active agency in collecting and analysing data rather than ignore themselves as a key player in a study.

According to these theoretical arguments about the role of the researcher, I positioned myself as an in-betweener in the process of data collection and analysis. As stated earlier, my personal background and experiences were interwoven with the participants' experiences, which became clear when I communicated with them in research interviews. This process not only allowed me to explore their experiences, but also enabled me to reflect on my own narrative experiences. Therefore, my role was marked by fluid identities, such as a former 2+2 student, a Chinese national, and a researcher. Such a mixed role locates researchers between different perspectives, which creates a "space between" (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 60), which allows them to negotiate their own experiences with participants' stories.

In the process of collecting and analysing data, I actually shifted my identities in the "space between" as an in-betweener in a cyclical and constant mode. For instance, when I interviewed different students and heard their stories, I usually recalled my own experiences as an insider who had a similar learning journey, with participants. Meanwhile, I usually compared each student's experiences in order to explore in-depth meaning via comparisons as an outsider who was doing a research study about investigating others' learning experiences. In doing so, I adopted a reflexive approach in my data collection and analysis with a consistent and flexible role as an in-betweener. Notably, reflexivity, as an analytical approach, has been widely adopted in intercultural educational research and qualitative studies (Blasco, 2012; Savvides et al., 2016). Reflexivity has various meanings, for example, self-analysis and self-awareness (Beck, 1994). However, the application of

reflexivity in international education with transnational contexts is still under-researched (Savvides et al., 2016).

Researchers have critically defined reflexivity. For instance, Beck (1994) suggested that it is a process of assessing researchers' individual experiences in their own contexts and situations via comparison with others. More specifically, according to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000), it is about "interpreting one's own interpretations, looking at one's own perspectives from other perspectives, and turning a self-critical eye onto one's own authority as interpreter and author" (p. vii). By adopting reflexivity, researchers can potentially enhance the communications between him/herself, collected data, and research participants in a flexible approach (Savvides et al., 2016). In this process, a researcher could critically shift between insider and outsider positions in relation to the research as an in-betweener to continually negotiate with data, self-experiences, and participants' stories in order to critically interpret potential meanings of research results (Savvides et al., 2016). Therefore, I thought that it was important for me to critically view my data and own experiences in this study from dynamic roles as an in-betweener whose experiences could add further insights into the data analysis and the illustration of the vivid pictures of students' learning in 2+2 programmes. To illustrate the vivid picture of students' learning journey and my own experiences in 2+2 programmes, I proposed to present the data in a narrative style.

In this study, I used my research notes and diaries as additional resources to help me analyse the collected data. Through reflecting on my experience, I was able to compare the similarities and differences between my journey and participants' stories. My notes and diaries were written during my doctoral study, especially from 2015 to 2017 in the process of my data collection and analysis. When I collected data, I also took notes to help me recall relevant experiences. These notes and diaries were documented in my notebooks and also online tools (e.g. Evernote). I wrote them in Chinese and also in English. When I sorted out my own data to prepare for the further analysis, I translated Chinese into English. During my reporting of my participants' stories, I usually checked my notes and diaries many times to seek possible connections to make further comparisons with my participants' stories to see whether there were some particularly interesting insights that emerged. Due to the individual privacy issue, I did not invite other people to help me translate all my notes and diaries. To ensure the accuracy of my descriptions and translations, I only invited an English editor to help me check

some of the resources that I used in my reflexive narrative writing. More detailed information about this approach is provided in the following section.

3.5.5 Data Presentation: Narratives as a method.

The narrative in this study is a method of presenting students' 2+2 learning experiences. It is different from narrative inquiry research. Generally, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggested that "the study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (p. 2). However, when the term narrative is used in research, it usually indicates various meanings. To clarify the meanings of narratives, Bamberg (2012) systematically analysed the uses of narratives from multiple perspectives. Simply, research can be conducted on or with narratives (Bamberg, 2012). Specifically, "research on" considers the narrative as objects of a study, which is also seen as a methodology (Elliott, 2005). In contrast, "research with" emphasises narratives as methods that focus on individuals' stories about "themselves and their own experiences" (Elliott, 2005, p. 22). When researchers adopt narratives as methods, the narrative is a tool that "views individuals within their social environments as actively conferring meaning onto objects in the world, including others and selves" (Bamberg, 2012, p. 79). Furthermore, it is necessary to illustrate narratives subjectively and interpretively. By following Bamberg's (2012) clarification of narratives, I adopted narratives as a method to guide my data presentation.

Narratives as tools to present data are based on a suitable narrative analysis method. Riessman (2005) introduced four methods of narrative analysis, including thematic, structural, interactional, and performative approaches. In this study, I adopted the thematic approach, which focuses on "what is said more than how it is said, the told than the telling" (Riessman, 2005, p. 2). So interview data are considered as a resource for constructing themes that can illustrate what interviewees have experienced rather than being the key research object of the study (Riessman, 2005). By inserting my reflexivity into the analysis and presenting the learning journey in narrative based style, I was able to not only investigate participants' learning stories, but also review and insert my previous 2+2 experiences into the exploration. In doing so, as Milligan (2016) indicated, the researcher then becomes a "knowledgeable outsider and subsequently an in-betweener" (p. 248). Through a narrative-based approach for presenting data, students' multiple and dynamic views and my personal experiences are comparatively reported in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are important in all educational research projects. As mentioned earlier, this study aimed to investigate Chinese students' intercultural learning experiences in their 2+2 programmes. Thus, the ideal participants for this study are Chinese students in 2+2 programmes. The human is the most critical object in a qualitative study, so it is significant for qualitative researchers to consider ethical issues in each step of the research (e.g. data collection, analysis and result presentation) (Creswell, 2007). Before starting the collection of data, I applied for ethical approval by adopting the following steps. Initially, I completed an ethical clearance form for the study, which was submitted to the Ethical Committee of the School of Education, The University of Queensland (UQ). In this report, I introduced the study, described the data collection approaches, and showed the way of storing collected data and examples of interview questions. Consequently, the study plan was approved by the chair of the ethical committee (Appendix 1). Ethics here were about ensuring the informed consent of the research participants. Then, I started to collect data.

An information sheet and a consent form were distributed to the potential participants before starting the data collection. Through these documents, I informed participants that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or penalty. As Creswell (2007) suggested, it is significant to guarantee that participants have no risks related to participating in the study and have the right to quit the study at any stage. The collected data will be destroyed and not be used as data sources for further study. As all students volunteered to participate in the study, I respected the participants and did not force them to join the study or answer inappropriate questions. Last but not least, all participants who joined the qualitative interviews were given pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity and to ensure the confidentiality of the data they shared, especially when I wrote academic articles. Individual responses for interviewing questions were not accorded to other people without their permission. All collected data was stored in the investigator's UQ computer and a password-protected hard-drive was used to ensure the security of collected data.

3.7 Trustworthiness and Limitations

As with all qualitative research, it is crucial to establish the trustworthiness of the study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are four aspects that should be considered to establish the trustworthiness of research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Furthermore, many different techniques can be used to effectively meet these criteria, such as triangulation and member-checking for credibility, thick description for transferability, external audit for dependability and conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I adopted several approaches to ensure the trustworthiness of the research.

First, I tried to establish credibility. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocated, credibility means the confidence that the qualitative researcher has towards the veracity of their findings. To achieve this goal, I adopted triangulation and member-checking. Triangulation is a way to ensure researchers have deep, rich, and comprehensive understandings of collected data by adopting different approaches. Specifically, as Denzin (as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) indicated, there are many approaches to achieve triangulation from different perspectives, such as multiple methods, sources, investigators and theories. In this study, I adopted investigator triangulation, which is to have multiple analysts review data in order to gain different views to help me evaluate and validate my research findings (Denzin as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To conduct this checking, I invited experienced PhD peers to help me examine the collected data. For instance, as I mentioned above, I invited some PhD peers who had qualitative research experience to help me transcribe and translate the collected data, which helped me to compare differences in language usage and meanings of collected data, because it was important to represent participant students' meanings as accurately as possible. Then we coded data and compared the differences so as to arrive at the best representation.

Additionally, I utilised member-checking to establish credibility. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that member-checking involves evaluation done by the research participants who initially provided the data, which is one of the most effective ways to establish credibility of data, even though there are some drawbacks to the approach; for example, members may share different stories when they check their observations in the original interview transcripts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In my study, after completing analyst triangulation, I emailed both Chinese and English transcriptions and translations of interview data to each participant to let them check whether or not their meanings and experiences were presented accurately. As Creswell (2007) indicated, research participants play essential roles in verifying qualitative data because they are the co-producer of the data.

As a result, most students identified that the Chinese translation was precise and accurate, but the English version seemed to be a little confusing in parts. Regarding this issue, I realised that it

might be difficult for these students to provide detailed feedback on the English version because they might also have language difficulties. Nonetheless, some students replied that the translation was fluent and accurate. However, some professional vocabularies (e.g. didactic instruction, summative assessment) seemed to be unfamiliar to them. To deal with this issue, I changed several terms into a more familiar language style. For instance, I used lecturer-dominated (or guided) teaching approaches to represent didactic instruction. This member checking process helped me to ensure the reasonable accuracy of transcribed data.

Second, I adopted thick descriptions to achieve transferability, which indicates that the research findings might be applicable to other social, cultural, and contextual situations. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is difficult for qualitative researchers to argue whether or not their findings are applicable to other contexts. However, such researchers should be able to provide thick and holistic descriptions and thus a reasonably accurate picture of their research findings for readers, who then would be able to assess whether the research findings were applicable to other cases and contexts. To achieve a thick description, researchers need to consider several issues when they report their studies, such as interviewees' information, and social and cultural contexts of conducting the research. In this study, I not only described information related to participants, data collection and analysis in detail, but also provided thick descriptions of research findings via narratives of students' learning trajectories in their 2+2 programmes. By using thick descriptions, I tried to establish the transferability for other researchers.

Finally, I tried to establish the conformability and dependability of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided explanations about the concepts of conformability and dependability. Conformability means the level of neutrality of the proposed findings that reflect respondents' thoughts and do not have researcher bias. For dependability, it means that other people could repeat the study and the findings would be consistent. To achieve these goals, I adopted an external audit, which required an outsider researcher to examine my research design and findings.

After preliminarily analysing my data and gaining potential findings, I invited one of my advisors, who was firmly engaged in my research design and data analysis, to review my translated data and to discuss the research design. Several issues emerged from the external audit. For instance, the advisor examined translations and pinpointed many language issues that may not be able to

explicitly reflect the meanings of interviews and make English-native speakers confused in understanding participants' meanings. Based on the advisor's suggestions, I revised the English transcripts and translations to ensure that I could use more accurate words to express the students' meanings. Through this process, I tried my best to modify potential language problems in order to ensure conformability. For dependability, the advisor suggested that my research design was repeatable, as it did not have complex processes of data collection. Through adopting the above strategies then, I completed the process of establishing the trustworthiness of this study and the preparation of collected data before starting further data analysis and presentation. However, I realised that there were still some limitations to my research design.

Two limitations were identified when I reviewed my study design. First, as mentioned in the section on the research site and participants, due to various restrictions (e.g. time, accessibility, and students' individual situations), I was not able to follow a group of students from China to Australia in a longitudinal period and also to recruit large numbers of participants to collect multiple data. Therefore, these factors influenced my research design and motivated me to conduct a qualitative study.

Second, only students participated in this study without other stakeholders, such as lecturers, administrators, and policymakers. Each programme has its specific cooperative agreements and policies. They may have many aspects of cooperation built in at various institutional levels, for example, communications between Chinese and foreign lecturers and decision makers. However, I was not able to access these people in both the Chinese and Australian contexts to collect related data that could provide direct evidence about teaching practices or other cooperative information because these students came from different programmes. They were studying in various Chinese universities that are located in different cities. When they came to Australia, they were studying at different universities as well. Therefore, it was difficult for me to get access to their home and host universities to collect data from other stakeholders. Only relying on students' perspectives may not be able to reflect a sufficiently comprehensive picture of the issues from other perspectives.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research methodology that framed this doctoral study. A qualitative inquiry was conducted to investigate Chinese students' learning experiences in 2+2

programmes. Interviews were adopted as the major data collection methods to hear students' voices of learning as 2+2 intercultural learners. The collected data was analysed comprehensively by utilising both inductive and deductive approaches. Specifically, thematic analysis was used as a major strategy in the first round of data analysis. Three key themes were summarised from collected data, which included the changes of agency, identity, and belonging. Furthermore, potential factors that shaped their changes were also revealed, such as teaching strategies, assessments, and engagement with ICTs, especially the Internet-based tools. In the second round of data analysis, deductive analysis based on others' intercultural adjustment framework was adopted to understand how these students dealt with the intercultural learning process in 2+2 settings. To present students' multiple and dynamic sensemaking process of learning as 2+2 learners, I proposed to use narratives as tools and carefully interspersed these with my own critical reflective experiences in order to illustrate a more nuanced picture of their intercultural learning journey. In the following Chapters 4 and 5, I will provide a detailed analysis of students' sensemaking processes of learning in their 2+2 programmes through reflecting and comparing their various stories and my own experiences to show how they experienced the dynamic intercultural learning journey.

Chapter 4:

Chinese students' dynamic intercultural learning experiences in 2+2 programmes

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide answers to the first sub-research question (How do Chinese students make sense of themselves as 2+2 learners, that is, make sense of their agency, identity, and belonging?). To address this research question, I deductively analysed participants' interview data to identify the key patterns that emerged from students' learning experiences based on Gill's (2007) framework. As Gill's (2007) framework showed, intercultural competences (sense of agency to deal with cross-system differences), dynamic identity, and finally the sense of 'fit into' the new context are key aspects to illustrate students' learning journeys and to examine their changes in the transition period. Thus, in this chapter, I propose to illustrate the research participants' dynamic learning experiences in their 2+2 programmes, drawing on relevant data sources.

The notion of "dynamic" refers to a series of meanings, for example, students' changes in learning focuses, strategies to deal with cross-system learning issues, and perceptions of their 2+2 learning. In their 2+2 programmes, students experienced a series of transformations in their respective learning journeys. The narratives from the respondents point to three transformative axes: (1) A change in their sense of agency towards the academic and sociocultural differences from China to Australia, (2) profound changes in their perceptions of identity during the entirety of the 2+2 learning process, and (3) a transformation of their sense of belonging.

According to the analysis of students' lived experiences, I contend that 2+2 programmes provide Chinese students with various intercultural experiences, including several loops of transformations moderated by individual capability, and educational systems. The following section provides a detailed analysis of students' sensemaking processes through reflecting and comparing

their various stories and my own experiences to show how they experienced the dynamic intercultural learning processes.

The chapter will respectively introduce the data analysis about what changes of agency, identity, and belonging students experienced in their 2+2 programmes by interacting with Gill's (2007) framework. At the end of each section, I will also provide the analysis of my own experiences to offer insights about the intercultural learning and adjustment in the 2+2 setting.

4.2 Making Sense of Students' Experiences of Intercultural Learning in the 2+2 Setting

Understanding students' 2+2 intercultural learning experiences is a process of making senses of the changes they underwent throughout the stages of their 2+2 programmes. Koyama (2011) defines "sense making as a dynamic, reflective, shared, and often contested activity" (p. 23). As a researcher who previously studied in a 2+2 programme, I wanted to make sense of the kinds of changes these students explicitly have undergone during their intercultural learning process by not only analysing my participants' experiences, but also by utilising insights from my own experiences in such a programme in the analysis as well. This reflective analytical process helped me to understand more deeply the research participants' intercultural learning experiences and also helped me to review and reflect upon my personal experiences as a previous 2+2 student. Through such sensemaking processes, I could come to understand the differences between each students' intercultural adaptation, competence, and (re)constructions of identity based on students' voices as represented in the interview data.

4.2.1 The sense of agency towards the academic differences between two educational systems.

When discussing the learning experiences in 2+2 programmes, most students spontaneously started to compare their different learning activities between the Chinese and Australian contexts, including inter alia teaching and learning differences, the place of ICTs, assessments, and academic atmosphere/culture, which generated cross-system academic tensions. Evidence from students' interviews suggested that they had different capabilities and strategies to deal with these tensions. As Pickering suggested, "within different cultures human beings and the material world might exhibit capacities for action quite different from those we customarily attribute to them" (as cited in Ahearn, 2001, p. 113). In this study, research participants shared various senses of agency towards the cross-

system changes they experienced, which provided a series of insights about their intercultural adjustments as 2+2 learners. Educational changes led to a series of learning shocks for some of the research participants, even though some participants already knew about several features of the Australian educational system.

4.2.1.1 In China: Shifting in between different learning tasks with pre-departure intercultural learning.

Many participants' interviews indicated that they were "in between" different learning focuses on their 2+2 learning processes. The in between in this case means students' constant negotiations with different academic tasks in a cross-system setting. In this process, students revealed multiple and varied senses of agency towards different academic tasks. Specifically, many students could positively react to different educational tasks and cross-system differences with progressive attitudes. In contrast, some students felt that it was difficult to deal with their learning issues in 2+2 learning processes. Students engaged in different academic tasks at each stage and they also needed to study in two systems, which meant they were involved in several rounds of adjustment. Generally, the first round occurred at the beginning of the 2+2 programme in China. The second round occurred when these students began their Australian learning stage. In each stage, students reflected various responses to the educational context.

In the Chinese context, many students started their 2+2 learning without a clear understanding of learning in this particular setting, which led to a sense of uncertainty towards future discipline study. Such feelings were mainly reflected in students' uncertainty towards their learning goals. For instance, Gaogao shared her experiences about her initial uncertain feelings:

> In fact, when I was administrated in this programme, I did not have a clear understanding of this programme, for example, how it works and what I will learn. I just knew I needed to go to Australian university after two years and also I needed to pass the IELTS exam.

Haohao further suggested:

> I did not have a clear goal because I was so young and did not have an understanding of majors and my learning interests. My family helped me to select my major because some of my family members were doing some businesses. They thought that area would have

> high potential in the future. Therefore, they suggested me to study in Business Management.

According to these extracts, it is clear that when these students started their 2+2 programmes, they seemed to be "strangers" in HE. Although these students had unclear directions regarding their discipline study, they shared a common goal, that is, to pass IELTS and then go to Australia to continue their study. As Gaogao mentioned, even though she had no clear understanding of her major, she knew the 2+2 programme rule regarding the required IELTS score. Similarly, other participants also indicated the importance of IELTS and their capabilities to deal with it. For instance, Baobao shared:

> I focused on English learning because it determined whether I can go to Australia after two years of study in China. The IELTS was difficult for me so I spend a lot of time on it. I proposed to get overall 6 and each subject was 5.5 at least.

Based on my own experience, for other students who study in mainstream programmes, they may not necessarily have to meet this IELTS requirement in their whole undergraduate study if they did not want to go overseas to take further postgraduate study. However, the 2+2 programme students have to pass the IELTS in order to continue their undergraduate study in the partner nation. To achieve the English requirement, many students indicated different senses of agency.

Baobao further shared her learning experiences and how she dealt with the IELTS test requirements. As she mentioned, "I did not hear about IELTS before when I was in high school. When I enrolled to my 2+2 programme, I knew I need to pass IELTS but I had no ideas about what it is, how I learn it, and whether I can achieve the required scores within the two years in China." Baobao's extract may suggest that she initially did not have an empowered sense of agency in her mind to deal with IELTS. In other words, she mentally felt uncertain to achieve the IELTS. To learn IELTS effectively, Baobao suggested various strategies:

> It took me a long time to be familiar with IELTS and master the relevant knowledge. Although my university offered IELTS classes for 2+2 students, it was not very helpful as it only had one class per week. So I went to the IELTS training centre to learn practical skills. Depending on my situation, I can spend a whole day there learning. Meanwhile, I mainly studied the IELTS official textbook to prepare for the exam and do mock tests one

> by one and again and again. Sometimes, if I cannot figure out problems, I liked to take individual tutorials to learn from professional lecturers to solve my problems. Learning IELTS cost a lot of money. If I cannot pass it, what I can do is to pay money and retake the exam until I achieve the requirement.

Baobao's experience indicated that the IELTS requirement of the 2+2 programme seemed to make her very stressful in the Chinese stage. Although Baobao felt it was difficult to prepare for the IELTS test, she subsequently achieved the required scores through her efforts. As she said, "Finally I achieved my goal. I attended the test 3 times and I got 6 in listening, reading, speaking, and 5.5 in writing."

Similarly, other students in the study (e.g. Lamei, Yuner, Qianqian, and Jiaojiao) also achieved the IELTS requirements when they were in China. When sharing her successful experiences in IELTS, Lamei indicated that there were foreign lecturers who specifically taught English in her programme, which helped her to improve her English proficiency. As she mentioned, "we had English courses to help 2+2 students to practise English skills with foreign lecturers. Particularly, I felt my speaking improved quickly." More specifically, Jiaojiao shared that most of her discipline courses were taught by English speakers, which made her feel somewhat empowered towards English at the Australian university.

> My Australian university waived my IELTS because my previous study was in English and most lecturers come from English-speaking countries at my Chinese university. So I did not worry about the language issues … As many courses were taught in English, I felt I did not have any concerns about language issues at my Australian university.

Jiaojiao's English-based learning experiences indicated that she had enough confidence regarding her language capability to adjust to the Australian learning context. According to these students' experiences (e.g. Baobao and Jiaojiao), they started to connect with the host context via learning IELTS and studying with foreign lecturers in the Chinese stage. These students seemed to be empowered to deal with the IELTS and English learning in the Chinese stage.

However, many students argued that it was difficult for them to manage the preparation for IELTS and at the same time learning in the discipline courses. To effectively deal with these tasks,

they constantly shifted their learning focuses. Specifically, many of them felt disappointed with preparing for IELTS, which took more time and energy to deal with. In contrast, learning discipline courses and passing exams became easy tasks for many students. For instance, Qianqian noted that there was an imbalance between learning IELTS and the discipline course.

> In China, most of my energies focused on learning English and to pass the IELTS, which were the primary goals and tasks for me and even most of my classmates. If I cannot pass it, I needed to learn English at the Australian university and spent a lot of money. In this case, learning major courses or related knowledge became less important compared to IELTS. I did not pay too much attention to major courses because I knew the exams were not hard to pass. At the end of each semester, I just needed to review and to remember the contents that were highlighted by lecturers, which could ensure that I can pass exams easily.

Qianqian seemed to be empowered to ensure the success of passing discipline exams by adopting his particular strategies, while he struggled to deal with IELTS. In doing so, he paid more attention to learning IELTS, rather than focusing on discipline knowledge in his daily study. This phenomenon was not unique. Shuoshuo also mentioned in his interview:

> I usually started to learn my discipline courses by the end of the semester. During the semester, I did not pay much attention to my discipline study as I was struggling with learning IELTS, which is much more complicated than discipline knowledge. Therefore, I did need more time to learn it.

Their experiences suggested that although they could manage the different learning tasks by adopting their strategies, they struggled with a sense of agency and handling these tasks without stress. Compared to the experience of language achievers, some students (e.g. Jiufu, Dengdeng, Dongdong, Gaogao, Shuoshuo, Qihao, and Haohao) also described their tortuous IELTS experiences. These students did not reach the IELTS scores that allowed them to start their discipline courses in Australia. Their experiences indicated profoundly disempowered senses of agency toward the IELTS and English, even though they also studied in the professional training school and learned from English native speakers. For example, Dongdong, as a student who had strong negative senses and experiences of learning IELTS, shared his experiences.

> I hated IELTS. It was so difficult for me to achieve an overall 6.5. I started to learn IELTS in professional school at the beginning of the second year at my Chinese university. I left university and stayed in the language school for three months to learn IELTS. However, I felt it was so painful. After completing three months, I took the IELTS exam for the first time. However, I only got 5. I felt uncomfortable and lacked confidence but I still wished to achieve the requirement. Then I took the exam another four times. Although my scores improved, there always one subject cannot reach the requirement. Finally, I decided to stop trying and to study English first at my Australian university.

Although Dongdong took the IELTS test many times, his results made him upset. Haohao also shared his views towards the IELTS preparation and English-related learning issues.

> My programme usually arranged some activities for 2+2 students to communicate with international students and lecturers at my university in order to let us know more about foreign contexts and prepare for IELTS. However, due to my limited English skills, I felt it was difficult to obtain useful information because learning IELTS and English was not just exam skills. It is more about another culture. When rethinking my experiences of taking IELTS exams, I can feel that there were many questions related to the UK or Australian contexts. Therefore, I think when I was in China preparing for the IELTS, I actually started to get connected with a new culture. However, I did not realise it until I came to Australia. I can notice that many questions came from real life in Australia.

Due to individual different English proficiency levels, the IELTS could be a challenging task for many students. Based on my experiences, Dongdong and Haohao's experiences were common. When I prepared for the IELTS, I experienced similar feelings and pressures; for example, I studied in both the university and professional training centre, and took individual classes. I can understand that when students paid much attention to learning English and wished to achieve the required standard, once they failed, their attitudes became negative towards the IELTS. Importantly, the realisation of learning a new culture was also tricky for me as well. I had similar experiences as Haohao. Once I came to Australia, I came to realise that many IELTS questions actually reflected real-life issues in Australia. However, IELTS is considered as a necessary task for 2+2 students who wish to start Australian study without language test barriers. It is difficult for students studying for

IELTS in China to grasp relevant cultural features of Australia that only become apparent when one lives in Australia for a time.

According to students' articulated experiences in China, it seemed that the 2+2 programmes partly extended the intercultural learning experiences from the host county to the home country. As these students mentioned, they had learned from foreign lecturers in either English class or discipline courses in China. Furthermore, although learning IELTS was a barrier for many participants, some of them could gain knowledge about the international context initially. Such experiences could be considered as a process of intercultural learning in advance to some extent. The intercultural adaptation started when they began their 2+2 learning process, which could be seen as an extension of Gill's (2007) concept of intercultural adaptation. In this pre-departure learning stage, students not only needed to reach the requirement of IELTS, but also needed to pass discipline courses. Such multiple task-based learning could potentially motivate students to learn how to manage their study and adjust to this particular programme setting. Facing IELTS pressures and discipline knowledge learning, many students constantly shifted between different learning focuses. In this process, they indicated a different sense of agency towards different learning tasks. After completing two years of pre-departure "intercultural learning" in China, most students started their real intercultural study at Australian universities, where they experienced the second round of uncertainty.

As Gill's (2007) transformative learning framework showed, many Chinese students studying abroad experienced three stages of transformation in their intercultural learning process. They started with stress in the new context as an intercultural stranger. After studying and living in the new environment for a period, many students can develop their intercultural competencies to adjust themselves to fit into the new system. Consequently, they could become "another person" through an adjustment to the cross-system changes. During this process, they may experience several rounds of spiral changes depending on the different tensions and issues they faced at different learning stages. As a stranger in the new context, they undoubtedly faced various difficulties, such as language, teaching and learning approaches, and social life issues (e.g. Gill, 2007; Gu, 2016a; Wu, 2015). Importantly, they also have various responses to the intercultural differences. I will further analyse the 2+2 students' various changes of a sense of agency during their intercultural learning processes in the Australian context below, drawing on interview data.

4.2.1.2 Positively adjust to the Australian context.

When I discussed the adjustment issues with the interviewees, many participants reflected that they were able to adjust to the Australian learning context. However, the processes of adjustment were often quite tortuous. According to Gill's (2007) study, when students go overseas, they could feel strange because they were unfamiliar with the new context. In this study, research participants also reflected uncertain feelings towards the Australian educational contexts. For example, Gaogao suggested that she felt disempowered towards engagement in Australian learning and living modes when she came to Australia.

> Even though I came to Australia with some classmates and my programme staff briefly introduced the Australian context, however, when I started my learning at the Australian university, I felt I had a lot of pressures, such as language problems, different environments, no friends or family. All these factors actually impacted on my study. I did not have enough confidence to survive in the new context. At that time, my primary goal was successful graduation from my bachelor degree.

The contextual changes from China to Australia made Gaogao feel stressed. Even though she knew specific information about Australia when she was in China, the actual situation still brought initial shocks to her in the new context. As she indicated, language barriers, environmental differences, and lack of family and friends for support made her feel a lack of confidence in her learning in the new context. In this case, surviving in the new context to obtain the degree was her primary goal. The similar situation also happened in other students' experiences, for example, Qianqian, who felt that an English barrier was the primary issue that made him feel that it was difficult to study in the initial stage at the Australian university.

> Language is a universal problem. As a non-English speaker, I found learning the discipline knowledge in English a challenge when I came to Australia. This was because of language and also my previous knowledge of my subject. I needed to spend more time and attention reflecting on what the lecturers taught. So, my primary goal was to pass all the courses that I selected in my first semester with no failures.

Qianqian's experience indicated that language barriers significantly influenced his learning. The unfamiliarity with the English-based teaching context made him set up an achievable goal in his first semester. As his extract indicated, he wanted to pass all courses without failing. These experiences reflect similarities with other researchers' (e.g. Gu, 2016a; C. Wang, Whitehead, & Bayes, 2017) findings that many Chinese were uncertain and stressed in their life and study when they initially shifted to a foreign context (e.g. the UK and Australia), due to the language barriers, study differences, and life problems. Although these stories demonstrated some issues in adjustment, some students shared their different experiences in the 2+2 transformative processes.

Jiaojiao was one of the students who changed her major from China to Australia. Her story reflects some differences compared to other cases. She was studying in Finance at her Chinese university but changed to Education in Australia. When discussing her transformative experiences, she suggested that she was familiar with the Australian teaching and learning settings.

> I didn't have particular issues when I came here because my previous university had similar class settings with the Australian university. I had lectures and tutorials in China so I can understand what the course will look like and I knew what I needed to do in each course. I think this experience helped me to adapt to the Australian teaching and learning mode.

Jiaojiao's experience indicated a particular experience related to the initial learning stress that these students usually had when they started their Australian stage. Compared with other students' issues in language and different teaching and learning environments, Jiaojiao seemed to be more confident in adapting to the new context. This experience could further indicate that the first two years of study potentially helped her adaption to the new environment.

Jiaojiao's case shows a different story and illustrates different values in her programme compared with other participants' initial stress and other researchers' findings. The individual differences could also suggest that even though these students all studied in 2+2 programmes, their programmes settings related to the connections between Chinese and Australian academic contexts may have many differences, which led to students' different initial adaptation feelings.

Many participants suggested that after studying in the Australian context for a period of time, they became familiar with these academic and sociocultural contexts. Therefore, they wished to

become academic achievers rather than only passing exams and obtaining degrees. As Gill (2007) indicated, students could start to develop their intercultural competences when they have more understandings of the new context. Consequently, they could change their views towards the intercultural learning context, their strategies to deal with issues, and values by comparing the different sociocultural contexts.

According to Y. Kim's (1988), in an intercultural learning context, students are motivated to actively adjust their strategies to adapt to the new context. When facing the new context, they had various strategies to deal with their learning problems, such as self-efforts and strategic changes in learning approaches, seeking help from other students, and adopting ICTs. For instance, after changing majors, Jiaojiao faced some problems in learning:

> After changing my major to Education, I was not quite sure how to strategically select courses in the first semester. I selected Educational Theory and Psychology, which made me feel stressful to learn them. However, I studied hard and passed them. In the second semester, I selected other courses that could reduce my learning loads, for example, Chinese, to make my learning more flexible without strong stress.

Jiaojiao strategically made changes when she selected courses to engage in learning. With a deeper understanding of the new major and context, Jiaojiao noticed that the Education was entirely different from Finance regarding the learning approaches.

> I think Education is much more difficult than Finance. Paper-based exams were always in Finance courses, no matter in the middle or the end of the semester. For Education, I feel I must have my own opinions or understandings on each course. It requires more understandings and critical thinking.

To deeply learn in the new major, Jiaojiao critically considered the differences in teaching and learning approaches between China and Australia. Regarding her views about her Chinese experiences, she suggested:

> Most lecturers rarely let students do something by themselves. Typically, they asked students to read books and remember the highlighted content. Teaching and learning mainly

> relied on textbooks. Although many courses were taught by foreign lecturers in English, I felt that their teaching approaches were Chinese-style. In this mode, I just needed to follow what they taught without many individual explorations.

Studying in the Chinese context, Jiaojiao felt that learning lacked creativity or explorations beyond the textbook-based knowledge.

> In China, learning seemed to follow lecturers' track. For instance, they taught me to count 1, 2, and 3. I needed to learn 1, 2, and 3. However, I did not have a keen ability to explore 4, 5, and 6. It seems lecturers have already set up the learning activities and goals for students. In Australia, lecturers may teach me 1 and 3 without 2. I needed to explore what the 2 is by myself by using various methods, for example, Internet-based technology.

To adapt to the new teaching mode, Jiaojiao suggested that she changed her strategies.

> I did need to preview lecture slides and other reading contents before going to a class rather than waiting for instructions. In this way, I can much more easily follow the lecturer in the classroom otherwise I felt it was challenging to learn efficiently. Generally speaking, I needed to work harder in learning at my Australian university.

When discussing her views towards the change of majors and learning contexts, Jiaojiao shared that:

> Education can let me learn knowledge in depth rather than only getting a degree. I was really interested in Education, so I can have an active attitude towards the changes in learning. I was not interested in Finance. In this case, if I still learned in that major, I will not survive. In Education, even though I faced many problems or difficulties, due to my interests, I wanted to overcome them rather than escape. If the lecturer lets me solve a math problem, I had no interest in more. If the lecturer lets me think of educational issues and write an essay to show my thinking, I really wanted to do it and to try my best.

Jiaojiao's story illustrated her experiences of intercultural adjustment and how she approached different educational issues in transition. She not only actively faced the different features of learning context and majors, but also positively changed her strategies to make her learning go along the right

track. Her effective responses towards the change of majors and circumstances provide further insights to coincide with Gill's (2007) finding that intrinsic motivations were sources of helping students to develop their positive attitudes towards the intercultural learning.

Furthermore, many other students (e.g. Lamei, Haohao, Dongdong, Baobao, Shuoshuo, and Gaogao), who did not change their majors, also shared similar positive changes towards the different academic context. Although they initially faced various shocks, they did actively change their strategies and attitudes to fit into the new environment and then to chase their academic goals. For instance, Lamei, as a student from a top-ranked research-based Chinese university, struggled in the initial stage at her Australian university because she supposed that she could have adopted the Chinese learning strategies to study in the Australian context. However, her thoughts seemed to cause her trouble.

> In Australia, when I was in my first semester, I relied on the strategies that were adopted in China: Studying hard before the final exam but not during the semester. However, I did not get good scores and failed one subject. The results made me upset. I realised that I could not keep doing this activity again. I needed to study hard during the whole semester.

The unfortunate experiences made Lamei feel disempowered and reconsider her previous strategies. Her conclusion was that Chinese learning approaches were not suitable for the Australian mode.

> In China, although I was studying at one of the top universities, most classmates did not pay their attention to study. Most students played together but did not have much communication related to learning. Furthermore, as I said, most students preferred to study before the exam. So I was used to doing the same in that learning environment. We did not have such stressful learning process as Australia.

To make changes, Lamei started to follow "active learners":

> I thought that making friends who were active learners was significant to me. Many of my friends liked to study at the library after class every day. They usually studied until the library was closed. Their learning attitudes and approaches influenced me as well. I started to follow them and study together because I knew if I did not work hard, I would not be

> able to gain a good result. When I saw other students who studied very hard, I felt I also needed to learn in depth. Otherwise, I appeared to be very strange in such a competitive university.

Lamei's experience indicated that contextual environment has significant influences on students' learning motivations and their desires to study (Gill, 2007). Furthermore, she seemed to have active intentions to do some change "mentally" and then find strategies to achieve her goals "physically" (Park, 2018). The changes in intercultural learning context established a space for Lamei to reconsider her previous experiences and reconstruct her learning strategies, which helped her to adjust to the new context.

Compared with Lamei's story, Shuoshuo also shared his changes of agency towards study during his intercultural learning processes. As he suggested, when he was in China, he did not pay much attention to study, but he still could pass assessments by studying at the end of the semester. However, he realised that such an approach was not useful anymore in Australia. He did need to change his strategies to achieve his proposed learning goals dramatically.

> At the beginning of my first semester, I did not know what a tutorial is and also did not know how to learn in this new context. I did not preview the course contents, and then I cannot understand taught contents. In the second week, I felt I was behind the normal process and missed a lot of important contents. In this way, after slow adaptation to here, I needed to spend more time reviewing the first week's contents. Based on this experience, I changed my learning methods. Now I usually preview course contents first and then do more reviews after class, which helps me to catch up the teaching process.

Shuoshuo actively realised that it was vital for him to change learning strategies, which could make him become empowered to the study rather than lose direction.

> For the current semester, I wish I can get Grade Point Average (GPA) 5 to 5.5 because my English is not very good, so I cannot set up a higher goal. However, I think I can achieve it as I had already learned some similar content when I was studying at my Chinese university. Although English is a barrier for me, I can study harder to overcome such a problem. As I said, now I usually preview course content and review lecturers' recordings via the

> Blackboard system. Through such an approach, I feel I can follow lecturers as I study. I don't think it will be a problem for me to achieve my goal.

Shuoshuo's experiences demonstrated his confidence to achieve his learning goals. Moreover, with regard to the role of ICTs in learning, Shuoshuo claimed: "In China, I think Internet-based technology was not very helpful to my study. However, it was imperative to my Australian study." He further shared his experiences.

> For example, I had a lot of group work at the Australian university; group peers usually set up a discussion board on Blackboard or other social networking websites. We usually discussed our topics online. In China, we did not have such an online environment and students usually organised face-to-face meetings to discuss the project. I remembered that when I first did group work, my senior classmate told me we did not need to meet each other and we can discuss our project on Blackboard. So the whole project plan was discussed and created by using Blackboard. I thought this was very convenient and really interesting. Such a system can help each other to work together and easily reach partners. If this group work happened in China, I can say that it would be impossible to communicate with each other only through an online learning system. It was difficult to get connections fast if you did not know their personal contact numbers.

According to Shuoshuo's experiences, although he felt confident about achieving his goals in Australia because he had foundational knowledge in the same subject at the Chinese university, ICTs were not supportive of his study in China. However, they became beneficial to his study in Australia. Many other students also mentioned that ICTs became much more important in learning in Australia than had been the case in China. For instance, Dengdeng said:

> I did not use much Internet-based technology or other kinds of technological tools in the learning process. Even though we have computer labs and Internet access, students and lecturers usually do not use them frequently in learning and teaching. It is difficult to think of the advantages of using ICTs at my Chinese university. I did not think Internet-based technology played an essential role in my study. It was used more for leisure and helped me to play rather than study.

These experiences indicate that there is a disconnection between the two learning contexts regarding the application of ICTs in learning. From China to Australia, the uses of ICT became a tension that could shape and reconstruct students' ICT-based intercultural learning experiences. These students who positively changed and developed their intercultural competencies indicated active senses of agency in their intercultural adaptation processes, which could help them to overcome cross-system shocks. Considering the ICT issues in learning, I had very similar experiences to those of my research participants. In China, I did not think that ICTs played an important role in my study. No matter whether I was studying at university or the language training centre, I felt that the Internet was for playing games rather than for learning. However, when I came to Australia, I noticed that everything related to study and other university affairs were based on ICTs, which potentially reshaped my views towards ICTs and strategies of using ICTs as a learning mediation. Generally, the research participants' experiences echoed Bandura's suggestion that:

> In acting as agents over their environments, people draw on their knowledge and cognitive and behavioural skills to produce desired results. In acting as agents over themselves, people monitor their actions and enlist cognitive guides and self-incentives to produce desired personal changes. They are just as many agents influencing themselves as they are influencing their environment (Bandura, 1989, p. 1181).

As the above extracts suggest, these students, who act as agents for themselves to conduct the intercultural learning, continuously reflected and reviewed the different academic environments from China to Australia. They then had different actions towards the changes in learning contexts, which transformed their individual capabilities to adjust to the new context. These students' experiences indicated that they were in between having positive mental intentions to adjust to the new context and have different physical actions to achieve their purposes (Park, 2018). Compared with the students who positively changed their agency, some students felt disempowered towards the changed academic and sociocultural contexts in the Australian university setting.

4.2.1.3 Being stressful in the process of adjustment to the Australian context.

As Gu (2009) explained, learning shock could lead to "intensive unpleasant feelings and may impose a deeper psychological and emotional strain on learners when they study abroad" (p. 42). According to the analysis of interview data, I noticed that not all students were able to actively start

their intercultural learning adaptation in their 2+2 learning processes. Representatively, Jiufu and Yuner showed pessimistic senses of agency towards the intercultural transformation. Their experiences provided contrary examples to challenge several existing views of intercultural adaptation that students usually experienced a gradual development process: initial strangeness to the "other" context to adjustment and finally achievement of personal growth via experiencing transformative learning (Gill, 2007; Gu et al., 2010; Y. Kim, 1988).

For Jiufu, the interview served as a form of catharsis because he wanted an appropriate opportunity to express his disappointment regarding his learning experiences. Jiufu identified himself as a successful student in the Chinese stage. As Jiufu described, "when I was at my Chinese university, I always obtained good academic results, and I was one of the top 5 students. Every year I can get scholarships." However, he did not reach the IELTS requirement in China, which negatively influenced his learning.

> I got 5.5 in the IELTS and needed to learn 15 weeks of courses. I was the best student in my programme. Most classmates needed to learn more than 20 weeks of English.

Even though Jiufu was the one who did not need to study 20 weeks of language courses in his class, he still did not achieve the minimum scores that allow students entry to major courses without any academic barriers.

He became de-motivated in learning after coming to Australia due to various barriers (e.g. language, peer relation, teaching and learning, and assessments) to the study. This very apparent change in attitude made his story very different from the other cases in the study. Specifically, he suggested that his learning experiences in the language school were the beginning of the difficulties he continued to face in his intercultural study and these made him unconfident to the study.

> When we did the language tests, most of my programme classmates were failed. Initially, we thought that our language ability may still not be good enough to pass the exam. However, after testing three to four times, we were still failed. If we cannot pass, we cannot start the major courses. It took a long time to stay in the language school … As I was one of these students, I utilised various approaches to pass the language test, for example, retesting the IELTS or attending more internal exams. I did not want to keep paying high

> tuition for the language school. Finally, I graduated from the language school after studying there for 15 weeks. I thought they just wanted to charge more fees from us. However, I did not understand why my programme mates were failed. Other students can pass the course easily. This was not equal to us.

Although Jiufu finally completed his language study after much struggle, his experiences indicated that he was disempowered to deal with the issues. The first learning experience in Australia left Jiufu feeling cynical and mistrusting of the university.

> Although I successfully completed such difficult learning and I could start my learning in the university, I cannot adapt to the new learning context. I felt the learning context, approaches, lecturers are entirely different from China. My learning attitudes dramatically changed. I wearied of studying.

This negative attitude existed in his major course study as well, which made it difficult for him to study in the new context. For instance, he felt it was difficult to engage in in-class communications:

> When Australian lecturers asked questions, I felt I have lost. I did not apparently know what they asked. In this case, I became afraid of going to class and lacked confidence in learning. For Australian students, I thought they were used to studying in such an interactive learning context, and they can actively communicate with peers and lecturers. I thought language issues were barriers for me. Even though I had a robust major knowledge or new ideas, I cannot clearly present my ideas clearly due to the language problem. Language barriers made me feel that the thinking and presenting were quite confusing.

Language issues seemed to be a significant barrier that limited Jiufu's learning. However, he further argued that he was not comfortable to study in a teaching and learning context that motivates and demands that students become autonomous learners.

> I remembered that one assignment asked us to design a website. The lecturer let us design by our interests but did not tell us what functions we needed to include, for example, what colours should be used, and other such questions. For many Chinese students, such freedom

> in learning may let them feel it is difficult to complete. For me, I felt that I lost direction and did not know what I should do to design a website because I had not created a website before and lacked useful knowledge when I was at my Chinese university. However, I still needed to design it with my explorations through the Internet. This process made me feel I did not get enough support from lecturers because they did not teach us a way of creating a website in details during teaching processes.

Jiufu's experiences apparently indicated his non-adaptation to the Australian context. It seems that he preferred to study in a didactical context with detailed instructions. To overcome such learning difficulties, Jiufu reported his strategies:

> I requested help from lecturers, and they gave me some guidance to complete my assignments. If I cannot get help from lecturers, I also asked peers and friends from China who have relevant experiences to help me deal with learning problems.

His experiences indicated that Jiufu had tight connections with his Chinese "homeland" in his intercultural study at an Australian university. According to Park's (2018) argument about agency ("to do mentally" and "to do physically"), Jiufu's stories suggest that he faced a series of difficulties that made him mentally averse to studying in the new context. However, he still had to study in the system to complete his degree physically. In doing so, Jiufu was immersed in between such a contradicted sense of agency. Other participants (e.g. Dongdong, Dengdeng, Lamei, and Gaogao) indicated the similar learning experiences. For instance, Dengdeng mentioned that:

> I usually made use of the Internet to help me understand professional concepts. Many concepts are difficult to understand in English, so I searched for them in Chinese to help me deeply comprehend the real meaning. Furthermore, there were plenty of academic papers and resources online. It was handy to me to understand knowledge by searching Chinese information. The Internet actually helped me to overcome some language problems.

Such virtual connections with the "homeland" suggested that these students' intercultural learning in Australia actually established transnational interactions of knowledge, information, and intelligence between the Chinese and Australian contexts. Although they struggled with some

learning tasks in Australia, the Internet-based connections with the Chinese "homeland" helped them to overcome some problems, which indicated the importance of ICTs to the students. Furthermore, their experiences provide detailed insights to suggest that these Chinese overseas students, as part of an Asian diaspora in Australia, still remained in touch with Chinese contexts (Rizvi et al., 2016; R. Yang & Welch, 2010). According to Jiufu's experiences, it seemed that even though he had completed his programme when he participated in this study, he still indicated a disempowered sense of agency towards the cross-system changes and pressures he experienced. In other words, he did not adjust to the Australian context after studying there. Compared with other peers, Jiufu did not adjust and still felt alienated even after graduation. This is in contrast with some of his peers, who eventually expressed positive attitudes towards their intercultural adjustment.

Similar to Jiufu's experiences, as a newcomer who studied in a Business major, Yuner also argued that she studied in Australia without a strong sense of agency due to her disempowered feelings, given the reality of new teaching approaches and different learning strategies. For instance, Yuner comparatively discussed her different views towards learning features.

> I realised that students did not have enough practical tasks or practical exercises after class in Australia. There were limited exercises books for students to complete. It seemed that such exercises were very sparse and a rarity. It was so difficult to get such practice from lecturers. Even though they gave us some quizzes, I cannot get the correct answers in time. I thought it was challenging to master knowledge if I only relied on listening to lecturers. Furthermore, it was also difficult to find such a practice online because most were in English and needed to be bought, which was very expensive. Even though I can get some of the practical tasks, it was difficult to understand due to language barriers. However, I can easily get plenty of practical exercises in China. I can make use of a variety of this kind of books to enhance my understandings of specific knowledge. In Australia, it seemed that most students might only rely on lecturers. If they can understand the taught contents, they may get good academic results. If not, they will be easy to fail in exams.

Yuner seemed to be used to the Chinese learning strategies that were based on a lot of practise exercises. However, she did not experience similar educational modes in Australia, which made her feel ineffective in her study. Her disempowered feelings were also reflected in her views towards the

differences in teaching approaches between Chinese and Australian lecturers. She provided an example to explain her views:

> For example, many Australian lecturers taught us 1+1 or 1+2, but they tested 2*4 or harder knowledge, which made me need to learn extra contents by myself after class … In this case, I really liked to study in Chinese style, and lecturers taught everything to students and gave us a lot of practise tests. I thought the Australian context was too flexible to learn knowledge in depth. When I had plenty of time, I did not know what I needed to learn in Australia.

Jiufu's and Yuner's experiences indicated their disempowered feelings in the new learning context. Although they engaged in the process of intercultural learning, they did not seem to be in control of their learning. Their non-adaptation to the English-speaking context and new teaching modes provided further evidence to show that not all students can successfully develop their intercultural competencies. It seemed that these students held negative attitudes towards the "others". The historical learning experiences in China played a dominant role in their intercultural adjustments or lack thereof to the Australian context.

Their non-adaptation indicated that such cross-system tensions negatively influenced their intercultural learning experiences. The learning shock definitely made them struggle in the intercultural learning processes. Their experiences, especially in Jiufu's language school, suggested that they faced negative discrepancies between their expectations, achievements and actual actions, which made them start to doubt themselves and feel frustrated in the intercultural learning process (Bandura, 1989). Based on such experiences, their attitudes, goals, and preferences regarding intercultural study were negatively changed. Their experiences also suggested that these students (e.g. Jiufu and Yuner) seemed to have a sense in their minds that they were not able to adjust to the new context. However, to complete the learning process and to obtain degrees, they had to study in a setting that positions them in between "do not want to do mentally" and "have to do physically". Such experience could add further insights into Park's (2018) suggestion about the relationships between the notions of "to do mentally" and "to do physically".

According to this analysis in this section, it is evident that these students experienced different intercultural adjustment processes during their 2+2 programmes. Most students faced stress in the

initial stages in each context. To deal with stress, these students indicated multiple senses of agency and adopted different approaches. After experiencing each context, they found their own ways to deal with different academic tasks with either positive or negative senses of agency. In the Chinese phase, as mentioned above, the 2+2 programme seemed to extend the intercultural learning from the host country to the home country. Although students did not physically move to Australia, their IELTS learning experiences and other related English-based learning activities potentially shaped an original intercultural context.

Due to individual differences, when they came to Australia, students reflected various senses of agency towards the changes of academic context. Many students experienced a "stress-adaptation-development" process, but some of them struggled in the intercultural context. Such responses to the cross-system differences resonate with Bandura's (2001) social cognitive concept that sociocultural contexts influence people's agency. It seemed that some students wished to be intercultural learners, but some did not. Therefore, the intercultural learning in the 2+2 setting dynamically shapes and influences students' sense of agency, which is continually shifting between empowered and disempowered towards different academic tasks.

4.2.1.4 My story: From struggling to smoothly under control.

When I recalled my own experiences in the 2+2 programme during my data collection and analysis, I surprisingly realised that my capabilities of learning as a 2+2 learner had changed dramatically from China to Australia. My ability to deal with learning tasks and issues in my intercultural learning process was modified from stressfully out of control to smoothly under control. The 2+2 programme generates an intercultural academic discourse that challenges students' capabilities of adjustment to unfamiliar contexts. In different stages of the 2+2 programme, I made changes in my learning strategies to achieve my goals. As Bandura (1989) indicated, "people anticipate the likely consequences of their prospective actions, they set goals for themselves, and they plan courses of action likely to produce desired outcomes" (p. 1179). My experiences resonate with such a claim.

When I was successfully admitted to my 2+2 programme, being similar to most of my participants (e.g. Gaogao, Dengdeng, Jiufu, Dongdong, Qianqian, and Baobao), I knew that I would go to Australia after completing two years' study and after reaching IELTS requirement. However,

as a freshman, I had no idea about the IELTS, my major, and my further study in Australia. All of these uncertainties made me feel somewhat unsure about my study and future. Learning in the 2+2 programme, I needed to achieve the IELTS requirement, which was my primary goal. Due to limited understanding of the IELTS and my weak English proficiency, I doubted whether I could meet the IELTS requirement. Similar to the students in my doctoral study who were struggling with English and IELTS test, I attended IELTS courses offered by my university to 2+2 students, and I also went to external training schools to take more individual sessions in order to reach the IELTS 6.0 overall. To achieve my goal, I took the IELTS exams four times. Although I finally reached the requirement, I felt that my energies were exhausted in that period of time and it also broke my learning balance between IELTS and my discipline study.

When I came to Australia without having to worry about the IELTS, compared to my participants' experiences, I had many similar issues with them in learning. More specifically, for instance, I needed to be familiar with listening to the English-based teaching. My brain needed to tensely work and reflect taught contents that seemed to be more advanced than what I learned in China. Even though I passed the IELTS, I thought that I did need to learn how to effectively study in the new context that had different teaching and learning modes and rules. I distinctly remembered that my goal in the first semester was to obtain a "Pass" in each subject, which is a similar aspiration to some my research participants (e.g. Qianqian, Gaogao, Baobao, and Dengdeng). In that time, I never dreamed that high academic achievement in my study was possible. I thought of surviving in the first semester without fails was the most significant success.

To deal with my learning barriers and achieve proposed goals, I usually sought help from my previous Chinese lecturers, for example, asking them how to create some special effects in Adobe Photoshop. Alternatively, I searched video tutorials via Chinese websites to learn detailed knowledge by myself. When I reflected on these experiences, I realised that as an overseas Chinese student in Australia, I still had tight knowledge connections with the Chinese context, especially in the initial stage through new communication technologies. This experience coincided with Jiufu and Dengdeng's stories, which indicate the importance of sociocultural and cultural connections between the home and the host context (Rizvi et al., 2016). The diaspora mediates these connections (Rizvi et al., 2016; R. Yang & Welch, 2010). My initial unfamiliarity facilitated my growing process of intercultural adaptation through diasporic experiences.

After becoming familiar with the Australian context once I had completed my first semester, I started to consider whether I could become an academic achiever compared with my previous experiences? Bandura (1988) suggested that when people have resilient views about their capabilities to achieve their goals, they can become more persistent in their efforts. In my second semester, I tried to make some changes in learning to increase the possibilities of obtaining higher scores. For instance, I started to frequently communicate with my lecturers to discuss my assessments, which I did not do when I was in China and during the initial stage of the Australian study. Furthermore, I tried to seek English help from the university to improve my language proficiency to reach a professional level because I knew that the IELTS achievement and knowledge were not enough to support my study anymore. By adopting such strategic changes in learning approaches, my GPA improved, and I achieved an average of "Distinction", which significantly improved my confidence in learning. Finally, when I graduated from my programme, I definitely felt that I was able to be a successful student who could control and organise my study in the new system after experiencing dramatic changes in the new Australian academic context.

Based on the reflectivity of my own experience and my research data, the changes of agency towards different academic settings in the 2+2 discourse involves a process of (re)shaping individual motivations and capabilities as intercultural learners who had a different sense of agency towards the changes of intercultural academic discourses. For instance, many research participants and I transformed our learning approaches and strategies to adapt to the new educational contexts. However, Jiufu and Yuner indicated that they were not able to study in Australia with positive attitudes because they seemed to be accustomed to the Chinese style. Based on the research participants' stories and my own example, it is evident that many students experienced a process of negotiation with the different educational contexts. In this process, their sense of agency to deal with learning issues also become multiple and complex. They might experience either positive or negative changes in this intercultural learning and adjustment journey.

4.2.2 The sense of identity as 2+2 students.

According to Gill (2007), intercultural learning can comprehensively bring various changes to Chinese students who might enhance their skills and reshape their identities. Identity refers merely to who am I (C. Taylor, 1989). From a learning perspective, Lave and Wenger (1991) explicitly indicated that the learning is a necessary and essential part of social development, which is a process

that is always accompanied by (re)constructions of self-identity through interactions with different sociocultural elements. Therefore, the (re)constructions of self-identity can be regarded as "long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53).

As a group of diaspora, these students showed various changes of identities as a 2+2 learner. Precisely, according to Robins (1991), diaspora usually reflects two trends of changing identities, including "tradition" and "translation". The former notion means that some members of the diaspora attempt to restore their original identities, especially when they are feeling "lost" in the new context. The latter term, translation, suggests that some diaspora are not able to be "pure" again after experiencing the other context, that is, they develop hybrid identities. Based on these theoretical explanations of the relations between their interactions and different academic contexts, I realised that my participants actually experienced the (re)constructions of their identities as 2+2 hybrid learners during their intercultural adaptation processes.

From the learners' perspective, most students become knowledge explorers in Australia as distinct from their experiences as knowledge followers or acceptors in China. However, they were different explorers regarding their attitudes towards the change of academic and sociocultural settings. Specifically, many students considered themselves as independent explorers. In contrast, some were not comfortable with being an independent explorer and thus demonstrated negative attitudes towards their cross-system learning. These research participants held on to their traditional identities, but also adopted elements of more hybrid identity.

4.2.2.1 Dependent and demotivated followers in China.

The changes in identity spontaneously occurred when these students started their 2+2 learning programmes. As mentioned above, in the beginning stage in China, many students indicated that they did not have specific learning ambitions and even had limited understanding regarding their further intercultural study and associated experiences. Such uncertain confusions perhaps reflected their immature personalities as young students. Furthermore, many students suggested that their choice of studying in the 2+2 programme was influenced by their parents or other relatives, which indicate their "dependent" features even though they had their own expectations. For example, Qihao mentioned that his parents could help him to find a job in accounting firms after graduation, so he selected to

study in Accounting. However, Qihao did not have strong motivations to be an academic achiever. As he said, "I did not have a specific learning goal; I just wanted to pass exams and get the degree." Differently, Jiufu suggested that his parents wished him to be independent:

> My parent wished me to be a university student. Taking this learning opportunity, they wished me to go to other city or country to gain various learning and life experience. This was my first time to live in another context. Before going to university, I was living with my parents without independent living experience.

These experiences show that many students were highly dependent on their parents when they started their university life. When I considered Qihao and Jiufu's experiences, I can understand their situations. As Bandura (1989) suggested, the environmental contexts and people's behaviours had reciprocal influences on each other. Due to the previous one-child policy in Chinese society, many students were the only child in their family. Based on my experiences, most parental attention usually focused on the only child. According to these students' experiences, they were profoundly influenced by the parental dominated context, which made them reflect specific "dependent" features.

After starting the Chinese learning stage, many students argued that they were followers, who usually waited for instructions without enough powerful motivation to explore knowledge independently. For instance, Qianqian felt that following lecturers and textbooks could ensure to pass exams, which was a safe way to study.

> In China, I did not need to do much more work by myself to pass exams. I think that I would not have explored something under the lecturers' guidance. They usually taught by following textbooks and we reviewed them after class. Exams were based on textbooks as well.

These extracts indicate that many students were used to following their lecturers to study in China. In this teaching mode, they felt that it was not necessary and vital to explore knowledge by themselves. Learning seemed to be highly dependent on lecturers and exams without strong self-expectations to independently explore knowledge. Importantly, they became demotivated in learning. For example, Shuoshuo said:

> When I was studying at my Chinese university, I was sluggish. I always prepared for the exam at the end of each semester. I did not study very hard during the whole semester.

Yuner also mentioned that she was used to the same mode as Shuoshuo adopted but she felt that the context in her university lacked academic atmosphere, which made her become one of the students who felt idle in university.

> I was so ambitious when I started my university life. For example, I wanted to read 100 books, get the highest GPA, be a member of the student union, and get all scholarships. After studying for a little while, I thought I did not have enough motivation because of the context and other peers. That environment was not suitable for academic achievement. In such a context, and it was difficult to be independent of other factors.

Yuner's story indicates that she experienced a change from motivated to demotivated learner who was influenced by the others in her Chinese university. The relaxed, non-demanding university context and peers provoked a passive attitude towards study. Such experiences also indicated that the others also profoundly influenced her identity as a student. These experiences undoubtedly provide further evidence to confirm Lave & Wenger's (1991) theory of identity constructions. The data suggested that the identity of these students in the Chinese stage was significantly affected by the context that they were studying and living in. Their self-reflections of their identities as a dependent and demotivated followers in learning can be considered as one type of outcome of the Chinese academic system. It is worth noting that although these participants were studying in different majors and universities in China, it seemed that they had similar self-understandings about their identities. After studying in Australia, these students reflected dynamic and fluid changes of identities.

4.2.2.2 Becoming independent and motivated explorer in Australia.

Due to the changes in academic and sociocultural contexts, research participants reflected different changes of identities as 2+2 learners. Most students become independent and active towards intercultural study and life. However, some of them passively became independent rather than had strong intrinsic motivations, which reveals a strong sense of hybrid identity. These different features provide multiple cases to challenge and refine Gill's (2007) findings and her framework, especially the concept of individual growth as a positive consequence of intercultural learning experiences.

Compared to the "dependent" and "demotivated" experiences in China, most students identified that they became independent and motivated learners in the Australian context. For instance, Baobao shared that:

> The most negative aspect was a high dependency. In the initial stage, I remembered that I felt it difficult to adapt to such a learning context. I always wanted to ask my lecturers to help me do something. This thinking could be a problem, but I have solved this problem. When I started my learning at my Australian university, I felt lecturers did not teach detailed knowledge in the classroom, and few contents were introduced. However, there were many gaps between the taught contents and assessments. To fill the gaps, I needed to be a self-regulated and motivated learner who can make use of other methods to overcome these shortcomings. Internet-based technology became much more useful to me at Australian universities.

She further explained that learning how to learn is more important than waiting to be "fed" knowledge.

> Before coming here, I did not realise I can become an active learner and loved to explore new things in this relaxed and flexible environment. Now I can do design work independently and have the ability to solve many problems. This was what I did not imagine before coming to the Australian university. So I was delighted with the transnational learning experience. In China, we have a well-known saying: "It's better to teach a man to fish than to give him fish." So I thought learning at an Australian university can help me to explore ways of fishing rather than obtain fish without the fishing process.

Baobao's comments showed supportive evidence to capture a snapshot of her changes of identity as an intercultural learner. As she mentioned, she actively developed her "fishing skills" rather than passively waited for "fish" in the Australian university context. Her experience might well indicate that she changed her role from a knowledge acceptor to self-regulated explorer. Similarly, other students (e.g. Dongdong, Gaogao, Shuoshuo, Haohao, Lamei, Dengdeng, and Qianqian) also indicated that they became independent and active towards study. It is worthwhile to note that although many students studied in different majors and different universities in Australia, they

indicated similar changes of identity as intercultural learners. For instance, Gaogao said that she became an ICT-based active learner.

> I thought I became more active when I studied in Australia because this environment and study style required me to rely on myself rather than lecturers or other kinds of solid material, for example, textbooks. Lecturers encouraged students to be creative and critical in learning rather than only mechanically remember what they taught in class. Thus, I needed to make use of Internet-based tools to develop my own learning approaches and abilities to achieve my goal and academic requirements.

Their experiences indicated that they continuously changed their learning approaches from those they adopted in China to those utilised in Australia. In the process of negotiation with different teaching and learning contexts, these students were also able to reconstruct their identities as intercultural learners. According to the above quotations, it is evident that these students not only became "another" person compared to their previous experiences, but also they realised for themselves the importance of dynamically changing their roles in the new context rather than passively waiting for change. Their experiences also suggested that the contextual changes had significant influences on students' reconstructions of identities as intercultural learners. Such experiences indicated that these students could expand their views and learn via their experience of cross-system tensions (Engeström, 1987, 2001). Their identities were "translated," as it were, after moving to Australia (Robins, 1991).

However, as mentioned before, not all students reflected positive changes towards their intercultural learning process, but they still needed to accept the situation. In this case, they showed negative attitudes. For instance, with regard to the changes in teaching and learning approaches, Yuner's experiences indicated that she seemed to be a highly dependent learner who was struggling with the new academic mode in Australia.

> I still prefer to study in a traditional Chinese teaching mode. I wish lecturers can write down the crucial contents on the blackboard and give us detailed explanations, especially math and statistic. Australian lecturers did not write essential contents on the blackboard during a class. They usually read PPT and explained orally without any writing. I felt it was so confusing for me to understand the taught content.

She further argued that she was a traditional learner who was not used to highly ICT-based exploratory teaching and learning mode.

> I preferred to study in a non-Internet context. In such a context, lecturers will provide more details to students. We do not need to explore knowledge by ourselves. For students, this approach will save more time and energy.

To adjust to the new context, Yuner said: "I force myself to study here, but I felt different studying without enough support from lecturers and other peers". Her experiences suggested a struggled picture of students' passive changes of roles as a learner in the intercultural learning process. Yuner's extracts provide an example to demonstrate that as a member of a diaspora, she had strong "emotional attachment" (Rizvi et al., 2016, p. 8) to the Chinese educational model.

Meanwhile, some students' experiences (e.g. Dengdeng, Dongdong, Shuoshuo, Haohao, and Yuner) indicated that their changes of identity to independent and active learners were heavily influenced by the new teaching model in Australia, where the students appeared to have no choice but to make adjustments. For instance, Dengdeng argued that:

> Many Australian lecturers preferred to teach more practical skills and knowledge. They wished students to do something by themselves through explorations rather than being taught everything. In this case, I felt it was difficult to keep following lecturers' teaching in some classes, and learning seemed to be superficial under this circle. I thought the knowledge that I have learned was based on my self-exploration from the Internet rather than mainly from lecturers. Therefore, I thought this was not a very good experience.

Although Dengdeng became independent in her study after coming to Australia, her experiences indicated that her changes were not entirely depended on her motivation, but also external factors made her passively adjust to the new context. Both the positive and negative changes illustrate a dynamic picture of students' fluid changes of their identities as 2+2 learners. These experiences provided further insights to show the "passively" active (re)shaping of identities in the 2+2 learning process, which could further refine Gill's (2007) framework. Their experiences and struggles also suggested that some students wished to be "traditional" and their "translations" were passive (Robins, 1991). In this process, some students developed hybrid identities that enabled them to sit in between

the sense of dependent followers and independent explorers. These two different experiences indicated that the Chinese and Australian educational variations had significant influences on shaping students' fluid identities, which suggests that "difference" (e.g. social culture and academic) is a basis for (re)constructing one's identities (Hall, 1990). Furthermore, these aspects could indicate that students' identities were not an accomplished fact; in contrast, their identities were continually being (re)shaped along with the changes of cultural and social conditions (Hall, 1990).

4.2.2.3 Who was I? Who am I?

The transformation of identity as a 2+2 intercultural learner is a complicated process. Based on my self-reflections of changes of identities from China to Australia, I noticed that my identity underwent dramatic changes during my 2+2 learning progress. Multiple discourses (e.g. parental, cross-system academic, and sociocultural) shaped the dynamic construction of my intercultural identity.

Who was I? I thought that I was a student who had the low academic achievement, a student who did not have the motivation to chase academic achievement, and a student who was negative towards learning. When I was in high school, I was not an academic achiever who could achieve entry to a top-ranked Chinese university. In that time, my parents and I were all worried about my future. After strategically analysing my situation, my parents and I decided to select the 2+2 programme as a way to start my higher education because my score reached the academic requirement of that 2+2 programme. As parents, they wished me to be educated in a recognised university first and then create opportunities for me to explore something new. In my mind, the 2+2 programme offered me an opportunity to experience Chinese higher education without competitive scores in the "*Gao Kao" (高考)*, which is the national university entrance exam in China. It seemed that the 2+2 programme was a life-saving straw for me. The parental and *Gao Kao* discourses profoundly influenced my identity as a high school student.

After starting my higher education journey, I became lazy in learning but active in playing. Studying in a context that lacked an excellent academic atmosphere, I had similar experiences to many of my research participants (e.g. Shuoshuo, Qianqian, and Dengdeng) who did not pay attention to study. Lave and Wenger (1991) indicated that the shape of identity is a process of interactions between the person and the sociocultural contexts that he/she lived in. Although I was living on the

campus and attending lectures, my brain was not wholly devoted to studying. As many of my research participants mentioned, peers did not focus on learning, which had negative influences on other students. As a young student who did not have robust capabilities to control myself, I was enjoying my "holiday time" in a relaxed context, which made me feel comfortable. Even though I had been stressed about preparing IELTS, I was not a "good" learner. The university context discourses influenced my identity as a fresh university student.

Who am I? Compared to my previous self, I became a student who would achieve academically, a student who had a strong motivation to chase his academic goals, and a student who can positively face and deal with challenges. As a member of the Chinese diaspora, I felt that I had some "translations" (Robins, 1991) in my life and study. Compared with my research participants' dynamic changes of identity in their 2+2 learning process, I also experienced such complex transformations when I was at the same stage. Precisely, my transitions happened in both study and daily life. In learning, I became a motivated learner from a demotivated student. I started to realise the importance of chasing outstanding academic achievements for my future. In my daily life, I also became a more independent adult who could manage various life issues.

As I mentioned above, I did not dream that I could achieve a high GPA and do a PhD research study. I challenged myself with dealing with different types of difficulties from China to Australia in both study and life. With my increased confidence, I started to believe that I could do something that I had not tried before. In the Australia context, as many participants said, teaching and learning modes were dramatically different compared with the Chinese approach. In the new environment, I needed to change my approaches and views to survive and develop myself further. For instance, when I was starting my Australian study, I did not realise the importance of being an independent learner in the Australia context. I was also used to waiting for instructions, and as such I missed much valuable information. However, I gradually realised that I must change my strategies to be an active learner who needed to positively explore knowledge, especially when most lecturers were facilitators rather than dominators in teaching. By actively changing my views and attitudes towards study, I did notice that I became more independent. Therefore, I can understand that my participants experienced multiple and dynamic transformations from almost dependent to independent learners, given the changes in sociocultural and academic contexts in the transition from China to Australia.

The complex and multiple discourses spontaneously influence students' identities. Consequently, as a result, many students can transform their identities to fit into the new context based on strategically managing their life and study in these different discourses. In contrast, some students failed to rebuild their identities as intercultural learners when they had a strong sense of identity as a traditional Chinese student. Through intercultural learning in the 2+2 setting, students also indicated different types of preferences and belonging towards the two separate contexts. The next section will illustrate students' changes in senses of belonging as 2+2 learners.

4.2.3 The sense of belonging as 2+2 students.

As members of the Chinese diaspora, research participants had various senses of belonging to the different educational contexts during the 2+2 intercultural learning process. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986, p. 10),

> The sense of belonging and identification involves the feeling, belief, and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group, and a willingness to sacrifice for the group. The role of identification must be emphasised here. It may be represented in the reciprocal statements "It is my group" and "I am part of the group".

In this study, these students reflected various preferences and belonging in the 2+2 intercultural learning processes. More specifically, as Chinese overseas students, a group of students enjoyed and satisfied their 2+2 intercultural learning process, especially in the Australian stage. Their positive senses of intercultural learning indicated their changes of belonging as 2+2 learners who preferred and adjusted to the Australian learning context.

However, some students believed that they did not belong to the Australian learning context. They did not adapt to the new learning situation and context and experienced loneliness, homesickness, and even isolation in the intercultural learning process. They preferred to study in the Chinese contexts as a Chinese learner rather than an intercultural overseas student. The explorations of the experiences of belonging could further refine Gill's (2007) transformative learning framework that did not cover the changes of belonging of overseas students in the intercultural learning processes.

4.2.3.1 Enjoy the 2+2 intercultural learning process.

Many participants (e.g. Haohao, Baobao, Jiaojiao, Gaogao, Lamei, Dongdong, and Haohao) indicated that they were satisfied with their intercultural learning experiences. Importantly, as Chinese overseas students, they believed that they had adjusted to the Australian context. For instance, Baobao mentioned that:

> Compared to my original expectations before coming to Australia, I thought my learning experience was much more significant than what I thought before. I thought I have adapted to the Australian context. I was delighted with my transnational learning. If I could rank my learning satisfaction from 1 to 10, I will give it 8.5 to 9.

Baobao's comments indicated her successful adaptation to the Australian context and satisfaction with her intercultural learning experiences. Similarly, Jiaojiao's comments represent the group that has a strong sense of belonging in the Australian context as Chinese overseas students.

> In Australia, I feel all things are kind and helpful … In Australia, I felt I have more confidence to study and want to be an active learner to develop my own ability. So I was satisfied with my choice. I believed that I could become better in Australia.

Compared with Baobao and Jiaojiao's comments, Haohao pinpointed his particular views towards the intercultural adaption and belonging issues.

> After staying here for a period of time, I adapted to the local environment. However, I thought the issues of adaptation were challenging to be explained because everyone had different backgrounds and ability to accept new things. For me, I thought the most valuable experience was not how much knowledge I learned. It was the independent learning experience. I learned how I could become an independent and active learner in the Australian context.

Haohao's comments show that he felt that he could adapt to the Australian context, which indicates his strong confidence in becoming another person that belongs to the new environment. These experiences are consistent with Gill's (2007) argument that "students who are motivated for changes and personal growth are more likely to develop positive attitudes, thereby enabling them to

deal effectively with challenges and differences in learning within the new context" (p. 180). However, based on Haohao's comments, it is important to understand individual differences of belonging towards the Australian learning context. These experiences also suggested that although many students did not complete their learning and were studying in different stages at Australian universities, they had adjusted themselves to the new context and also achieved several developments. In contrast, some students reflected strong senses of isolation in the new context.

4.2.3.2 Go home as soon as possible.

Amongst the research participants, Jiufu and Yuner reflected a strong sense of non-adaptation to the new context. Their experiences outlined in the above sections indicated a series of snapshots of their non-adaptation as Chinese overseas students in their 2+2 intercultural learning processes. Notably, when discussing their preferences regarding learning context, they all shared that they wanted to go home after completing their study. Such experiences suggest a sense of isolation in the new environment. For example, Yuner explained her understandings of why she felt passive in the intercultural context:

> The primary issue was the adaptation to Australian life and learning context. After studying here for a long time, I felt I still preferred the Chinese context. In Australia, I did not have too many friends and no family members. I wanted to live in a metropolis and to stay with my friends and family. So I did not want to apply for PR now, and I wished I can graduate successfully. Now I am planning to prepare for finding a job in China after this semester.

Yuner did not only feel that it was difficult to adapt to the Australian teaching and learning mode, but she also did not have support from family and friends. Such feelings of isolation made her passive and upset. Her experiences indicated a strong sense of homesickness. Compared with her experiences, Jiufu shared an example to illustrate his sense of isolation in learning.

> One impressive thing for me was writing an assignment in the language school. When I was learning English, I needed to submit a portfolio, which included various written works. Before doing this assignment, I asked a stupid question to lecturer: "I need to write by hand or type on the computer?" The lecturer appeared to be very unbelieving to me. I thought she might think that why you asked such a question? I explained to her that some of my

> Chinese lecturers wanted to avoid plagiarism and did not let us write assignments by using a computer. However, the lecturer told me that they had stopped writing assignments by hand for quite a long time ago. This case made me feel that I was so out-of-date and not belonging to the Australian ICT-based learning mode.

This example indicated that Jiufu was shocked by the ICT-based learning environment when he studied in a language school, which made him feel that he seemed to be a stranger in the ICT-based learning context. Although he tried to make some changes to adapt to the Australian mode, he still felt that his 2+2 learning was problematic.

> I preferred to study in China. In China, I did not have language and cultural barriers. As I said, even though I study in Beijing, I can adapt to being there in a short time because there were no cultural and language issues. Furthermore, the Australian university had too many assignments and exams compared to my Chinese one, which made me feel so stressful. When I could not communicate with other people effectively, I believed that studying became much more challenging.

Considering the life issues, Jiufu also had negative experiences, which made him feel "strong loneliness", for example, in respect of the relations with peers.

> I faced a strong isolation from my Chinese classmates. When I studied hard, they felt I was a crazy boy, and I was very strange. Some of them said many bad things that made me uncomfortable. They thought I was not smarter than them. They cursed that the more I studied, the lower mark I may have. One of my classmates told me that most of my classmates did not think that I can graduate from the language school and university successfully. Such rude information makes me feel angry. Even though I spent much time studying, finally my score may be still lower than them.

Some of Jiufu's classmates apparently did not have a friendly attitude towards him, which made Jiufu felt uncomfortable when he heard such kind of harsh sayings. He further complained that it was so difficult to make real friends in Australia.

> I proposed to live together with my Chinese classmates and help each other. However, the

> situation was entirely different. We did not contact each other much after coming to Australia. This may be because everyone had his or her things in both life and study. It was difficult to make real friends in Australia. So I wished I can leave Australia after graduation.

Jiufu's experiences showed that he faced various issues in both study and life during his intercultural learning process. However, as he mentioned, "when I faced such situations, I felt morose, but I must suffer this process to achieve my learning goal". According to his interviews, it is evident that he did not have a strong sense of belonging towards the intercultural learning as an overseas Chinese student in Australia. The feelings of isolation ensured he suffered various negative experiences. According to Jiufu's and Yuner's experiences, it is worth noting that although Yuner was in her early stage in Australia, she had already had a strong sense of isolation. For Jiufu, as his interview indicated, although he completed his study in Australia, he was still not able to "fit into" the "so-called" new context. Therefore, it seemed that having a sense of belonging is not profoundly influenced by the length of stay in a new environment instead each has their specific attitudes.

These experiences potentially offered some insights to the diasporic experience. These students believed that they belonged to their homeland no matter how long they stayed in the new context (Rizvi et al., 2016). Although Jiufu and Yuner's stories indicated their keen senses of non-belonging and non-adaptation to the Australian context, their experiences showed a particular case of the diaspora's emotional connections with their home country. The negative "diasporic experiences" made them have a strong sense of belonging to their homeland. Furthermore, these negative experiences could add insights to Otten's (2003) assumption that "if foreign students do not develop close social relationships after a certain period of time, negative effects on their readiness for learning, their consciousness for relevant learning tasks, and their academic performance might occur" (p. 20).

More specifically, Jiufu's isolated experiences with his Chinese classmates provided a particular example different from that of Rizvi et al.'s (2016) finding that "individuals are recognised and accepted within their communities as being diaspora members" (p. 8). Although he was a native Chinese 2+2 student, Jiufu, as an individual member of the group of his 2+2 Chinese diaspora, felt isolated from his peers in the micro 2+2 programme community. It seemed that other individuals did not readily accept him as a member of the 2+2 diaspora. This experience indicated that acceptance issues among members of the diaspora potentially influence an individual's sense of belonging and

even affect the whole intercultural learning and life experience. Although individuals can physically become a member of a particular group of diaspora, they may not be emotionally and kindly accepted into such a group. Therefore, such examples of being a member of a diaspora group indicated the complexity of understanding the changes in belonging that these overseas students experienced.

This section has shown various students' senses of belonging in the new academic and sociocultural contexts. As the results indicated, not all students could deal with the intercultural barriers (e.g. language, teaching and learning, and relations with others). Although many students finally felt that they could adapt to the new context, there were still some participants who struggled with the intercultural learning processes.

4.2.3.3 As an intercultural learner, I may belong to an "in-between" space.

Compared with these students' different senses of belonging as Chinese students in the Australian context, I will here reflect upon my experiences. As McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggested, the following simple sentence can reflect the senses of belonging: "It is my group" and "I am part of the group." In my case, I experienced a smooth process of changing the sense of belonging, but I felt it was difficult to define where I belonged, even though I have studied in Australia for nearly eight years and even obtained Australian permanent residency (PR). When I considered my belonging as an intercultural learner, I think I belonged to an in-between space between the two different contexts (Rizvi as cited in R. Yang & Welch, 2010).

When I first landed in Australia, I was shocked by the different educational, natural, and social contexts. Similar to other participants, I also had a sense of unfamiliarity with the new environment; I was homesick and experienced loneliness. In that situation, my mind told me that I was a Chinese student in Australia and I was an overseas student. I did not belong here, and I was just a sojourner in Australia, here to obtain my degree. Such a feeling existed in my mind from the initial stage until I graduated from my programme. I had a strong sense of belonging to the Chinese context. This is because even though I was able to chase my academic dreams and studied hard by adopting new strategies, I believed that the identity of an overseas student was still my label and I did not belong to Australia. My aim was to graduate rather than adapt to the local context. It seemed that although I was a member of my Australian university, I was not a member of the society. In that period, once I completed my final assessment and exams, I booked the ticket and then went back to China. For me,

it seemed that I was doing some cross-country business. I stayed in Australia for three months to complete my learning business and then went back to China for one or two month's holidays. Such experiences suggested that as a member of various diasporas, I initially had a strong sense of belonging to my home country, which indicated my strong attachment to China (Rizvi et al., 2016).

After completing my degree and starting my research study, I realised that I seemed to be used to studying and living in the Australian context. This is because I had experienced several academic achievements, which did not happen in China. The successful experiences made me feel that only in Australia could my dreams come true. However, although I had adapted to the Australian context, especially in the academic setting, it seemed that I had more emotional contacts with China. For instance, I usually communicate with my family and friends in China to discuss work, life and study issues via ICT-based tools, for instance, WeChat. The development of technology made the emotional distance of diaspora became virtually shorter, which helped me to keep more connections with my home country and family (Rizvi et al., 2016). In this ICT-based context, although I physically studied in Australia, I still had strong emotional and technologically mediated contacts with China.

With the rapid development of ICTs, I distinctly remembered that when I came to Australia in 2009, the mobile technology and the Internet were not well developed and utilised compared with the current stage. In that period, the Internet quota was limited and expensive. The mobile technology was in the initial developing stage. Most communications with my homeland were based on traditional desktop-based personal computer (PC) applications or expensive telephone calls. However, the current situation is entirely different. As I mentioned, I can use WeChat to communicate with my friends and family easily via either PC or mobile devices. I can make unlimited international calls to select countries for a low fee. Such technological changes made me feel that the "time and space" distances have been compressed and facilitated by the new technologies (Harvey, 1999).

According to my daily observations and discussions with other Chinese students, they have similar experiences that communications with China have become unobstructed. Although my study did not focus on the ICT communications issues, I do believe that such technological developments help the group of diasporic students to have more connections with their homelands, not only in academic study but more in daily life. When I recalled my experiences, I did feel that my and even

other Chinese students' experiences of ICT-based communications in learning and life suggest that new technology played a crucial role in connecting them with the homeland (Rizvi et al., 2016).

Such feelings made me float in the two different contexts, which led to my "in-between" belonging. Through exploring my research participants' stories and reflecting on my own experiences, I believed that it is difficult to say which society or system that the intercultural learners (e.g. me) belong to. Even though different students presented various preferences towards these systems, I believed that intercultural learners' belonging is (re)constructed dynamically during their intercultural learning processes.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed students' intercultural learning experiences through adopting and refining the transformative learning framework (Gill, 2007), and reflecting on my own 2+2 learning experiences. On the one hand, the results provided some evidence to approve Gill's (2007) conceptual process of students' intercultural adaptation, development of intercultural competence, and (re)construction of self-identity. My analysis indicated that students' intercultural learning process was dynamic rather than fixed (Gill, 2007; Gu, 2009). On the other hand, my study provided further insights into this process by considering Chinese students' intercultural learning process in 2+2 programmes from the perspective of the diaspora.

According to students' various intercultural learning experiences, I argued that the 2+2 setting extended intercultural learning, which potentially at least meant that the students in the 2+2 programme began their intercultural learning and adjustment in the Chinese stage. When they physically moved to Australia, the real intercultural learning journey was started. However, due to the first two years of learning experiences, these students indicated different capabilities to adjust to the new context. Consequently, a group of students were able to actively change their previous Chinese learning strategies to reshape or relocated themselves as independent learners in the new context.

In contrast, some students seemed to passively accept the changes as they had to complete their study. In this passive learning and living process, they were suffering unfamiliarity with the new teaching and learning mode, isolation from peers and homesickness, and language barriers. Such experiences of struggle made them feel that they did not belong to the Australian context and they

wished to return to the Chinese system. These experiences also provided several insights to argue that not all students could potentially achieve positive adjustment and development in the process of intercultural learning as Gill's (2007) framework suggested. Notably, many students may immerse in stress and adaptation but not be able to reach development in a positive way. After understanding the various changes that these students experienced, it is also essential to explore in what kinds of situational context they had such individual changes.

As students' 2+2 learning experiences in Chapter 4 showed, they experienced constant changes from university novices in China to intercultural learners who hold multiple views towards the 2+2 learning journey. Importantly, their various changes of agency, identity and belonging revealed how they "made sense of what they do" (Ellis & Goodyear, 2016, p. 181). Their learning journeys can be considered as examples that illustrate vivid pictures of global mobility and interactive transition of people, culture, and education across different places, spaces, and times. Such movement potentially enables more connections and communications between the home and host countries, which creates "new spaces and places, and new speeds and rhythms of everyday social practice" (Leander et al., 2010, p. 329). However, the relationships between students' learning and the new spaces and places still merit more in-depth analysis, especially under the rapid development of technology (Leander et al., 2010). In Chapter 5, I will illustrate the contour of the learning space that is created by the 2+2 setting.

Chapter 5:

The mapping of the 2+2 "in-between" learning space

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to address the second sub-research question (What factors may have impacted on the students' intercultural learning experiences?). To address this question, I inductively analysed students' interviews and found that Internet-based technology, assessment modes, teaching strategies, and university contexts were the emerged themes (factors) that play important roles in constantly (re)shaping students' senses of identity, agency, and belonging. These factors potentially mapped an 'in-between' space for students' cross-system learning.

Based on analysing participants' 2+2 learning experiences, I noticed that it seems that there is a special imagined zone in their minds, which makes many students negotiate between their home countries and their host country of Australia within the 2+2 setting. Such a special zone can be regarded as an in-between space (Bhabha, 1994). In this chapter, I will appropriate Bhabha's (1994) concepts of third space to analyse and map the contours of the 2+2 in-between learning space based on participants' voices as articulated through research interviews. Through this analysis, I wish to add further empirical insights into the research gap concerning the relationships between learners and learning space. As Ellis and Goodyear (2016) highlighted, "understanding students' perspectives in researching the use and meaning of space is crucially important" (p. 153). In doing so, I propose to explore the following key points: (1) what elements in students' 2+2 learning process are vital for them to shape their senses of in-betweenness; (2) how these elements shape the in-between learning space; (3) what factors made these changes.

Based on investigating the above three points, I intend to conceptualise and theorise a 2+2 in-between learning space that allows students to experience intercultural education dynamically. Specifically, the illustration of the spectrum of a learning space is elaborate, which means that it is impossible to holistically cover and analyse all potential factors that create a learning space (Ellis &

Goodyear, 2016). Therefore, the analysis mainly focuses on my respondents' responses in interviews. What research participants shared with me was considered as important aspects that influenced their cross-system learning experiences for them during their 2+2 study. To add further insights into the analysis of the construction of a 2+2 in-between learning space, I will also elaborate on my experiences as a former 2+2 learner from a reflexive stance.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate the definition of the in-between learning space first. Then, I will analyse the contour of the 2+2 learning space based on students' interview data. Specifically, the role of ICTs in learning, assessment modes, teaching strategies, and university context will be critically discussed respectively. Furthermore, I will also add my own experiences and views on these aspects into the analysis, which aims to offer different insights into the illustration of the contour of 2+2 in-between learning space. Finally, a conclusion will be given to summarise the key points of this chapter.

5.2 The Definition of In-Between Learning Space in the 2+2 Setting

The 2+2 programme allows learners to engage in global mobility from both physical and virtual perspectives under the constant developments and changes in technology, society and culture. As students' experiences indicated, they studied in China and Australia across their undergraduate period, which indicated the flexible movement of their learning and living places between China and Australia. With regard to the 2+2 setting, it is a cooperatively combined educational mode of two different places (e.g. China and Australia). For 2+2 students, they started to construct their own learning space via experiencing movement across places. To experience the different educational contexts is to act on these given places first and then to create multiple understandings towards the new context, which potentially establishes an in-between learning space.

Considering the meaning of learning space, Goodyear (2006) suggested that it refers to an abstract metaphorical concept that people can share and evaluate their specific experiences as these happened in specific educational and life contexts. In a learning space, learners have "opportunities to examine their cultural context" (Goodyear, 2006, p. 221). However, according to M. Bennett (2010), when researchers investigate intercultural related experiences, it is important to treat the cultural stereotypes strategically rather than to label each individual by an over-generalised cultural sign. In other words, the way to conceptualise and understand the abstract space is not as simple as it

is a terrain that has many overlapping layers of different cognitions, sociocultural issues, and individual differences.

In the 2+2 setting, the in-between features became more apparent. When students studied at their Chinese universities (places), they needed to follow specific rules proposed by the university, lecturers, and other elements, which could be seen as a striated space. Learning in a striated space, students further developed their own smooth space where they potentially developed various attitudes towards the striated space. Depending on the changes of striated space, they also dynamically adjusted themselves to develop further smooth spaces. When they moved to Australia, places became different and then striated space also had its particular features. Then, each student potentially changed in respect of agency, identity and sense of belonging in their new smooth spaces, which could be contrasted with previous ones in China. As a result, they not only needed to develop new smooth spaces by continually negotiating with the striated space in Australia, but also kept developing new smooth spaces through comparisons with the Chinese context. In this process, they potentially immersed in a complicated in-between position. Meanwhile, the 2+2 setting also positioned them in-between various local places, smooth spaces and also striated spaces. Finally, the students'sense of in-betweenness might potentially be smoothly mapped.

Chinese students' 2+2 learning experiences not only reflect various cultural and educational differences between China and Australia but also reproduce their identity as 2+2 learners who have varying degrees of agency to deal with cross-system barriers during their transitions from China to Australia. According to Hall (1990), one's identity is constantly being (re)constructed and is thus fluid via the communications and exchanges between, across and in between different cultures. As results reported in Chapter 4 demonstrated, students' sense of agency towards the cultural and educational differences indicated their multiple capabilities and attitudes as intercultural learners who needed to deal with various barriers in the cross-system context. Many students were able to overcome barriers actively and have progressive attitudes towards the new context. In contrast, some participants felt disempowered to deal with problems in their intercultural learning and adjustment processes. Consequently, their identities and belonging were also influenced and partly changed under the transition of sociocultural and educational contexts from China to Australia.

In the process of studying in the intercultural context, students spontaneously compared their Chinese and Australian learning experiences from different perspectives. Such comparative experiences potentially created a particular zone that is a space for students to reflect on and negotiate educational and cultural differences. This zone is regarded as the third space of different cultures (Bhabha, 1994). In this space, different educational and cultural features were continually and animatedly intertwined, which can be considered as the origin of producing the in-between space (Bhabha, 1994). In this space, the boundaries of different cultures become blurred, and people could have various unexpected new understandings of different cultures (Bhabha, 1994). Importantly, their negotiations of different cultures are dynamic in the in-between space, which is always changing and complex and challenging to be explicitly understood (Bhabha, 1994). Therefore, it is essential to explore how these students' intercultural learning experiences produced the in-between space in a 2+2 programme in order to explain why they had various changes of identity, agency, and belonging.

5.3 The Production of the In-between Learning Space in the 2+2 Setting

The 2+2 programme offers a particular learning pathway for learners to complete their degrees in different contexts compared with the more common programmes that only require students to study in one country. Students' lived experiences of studying in 2+2 programmes indicated a series of key elements that constructed an in-between learning space. Based on analysing students' interviews, learning tools (e.g. ICTs), assessments, teaching strategies, and general university academic atmospheres were considered as important "actants" to shape the in-between space (Latour, 2005). These actants created students' learning networks in an intercultural context (Latour, 2005). In this mixed space, many students spontaneously positioned themselves in between China and Australia through reflecting and comparing their different experiences.

In this study as derived from the data analysis, the in-between space has two layers. The first layer of in-betweenness refers to students' changing positions as members of a place where they were physically studying and living. Their communications, interactions, and negotiations with other actants in a place (e.g. the Chinese university) created their own sense of in-betweenness. Learners' relationships with different actants positioned themselves in-between their surroundings. Interconnections with other actants shaped learners' networks in their places, for example, learners' interactions with lecturers and peers, which may indicate different relationships among these people.

In short, the first layer of in-betweenness can be seen as a vertical in-betweenness, which reflects students' interactions with other actants via either physical or virtual mediation in one place.

The second layer of in-betweenness refers to a blur of fuzzy space where these students hover between their home and host educational and cultural systems. In this space, students create their sense of in-between via comparative reflections of the differences between the two systems. They go beyond the boundary of one place and create an in-between space, which allowed learners to understand the values and issues of different educational contexts. Such in-between space becomes much more complicated than the previous one generated in one place without cross-system interactions because the educational and cultural differences between China and Australia make students aware of various contradictions. In this space, students can value the differences of cultures and develop their individual identities as in-between learners (Bhabha, 1994; Rutherford, 1990). In general, the second layer of in-betweenness can be regarded as a horizontal in-between space which allows learners to comparatively reflect on their intercultural learning experiences and changes of identity, agency, and belonging. To conceptualise these two layers of in-between space of students' intercultural learning, I will illustrate the spectrum of the 2+2 in-between space and show students' dynamic negotiations in this space with different actants.

First, the role of ICTs in shaping in-between spaces for students will be discussed. Specifically, the combination and balance of using traditional materials (e.g. textbooks) and ICT-based tools (e.g. the Internet) in and across educational systems show how students' learning happened in-between the physical and virtual worlds. Second, students' views of different academic tasks across two systems will be analysed to reveal how different academic measurement approaches in 2+2 programmes constructed the in-between space of assessment. Third, students' reflections of different teaching strategies adopted by lecturers in China and Australia will be reported comparatively. The teaching strategies and focuses have significant influences on students' learning approaches and their attitudes towards study. Last but not least, the general university culture, especially peers communication and relationship, will be analysed to reflect how students positioned themselves as learners in different sociocultural contexts (e.g. Chinese collectivism and Australian individualism). Through a careful analysis of these four aspects that were important for research participants, I wish to illustrate a picture of the 2+2 in-between space, especially from the perspective of the students' learning experiences.

5.3.1 The in-between space of traditional physical and ICT-based virtual learning worlds.

The learning space is complicated when the physical and virtual worlds are connected and mixed together. The "physical places" mainly refers to learning contexts that have not many ICT-assisted features and elements. The "virtual spaces" can be understood merely as ICT-assisted context. The combination of physical and virtual learning worlds is considered as a blended context. In this study, students reflected different stories of experiencing the different learning places and spaces. Specifically, as many students suggested, the use of ICTs in China and Australia was dramatically different in relation to their education.

5.3.1.1 From physical place to an ICT-based in-between space.

Students' learning experiences indicated a picture of their movement from a mainly physical learning place in China to a combined in-between space in Australia. In China, many students seemed to mainly study in the physical place without deep engagement in the virtual world. For instance, learning focused on textbooks without many ICT-assisted experiences. Evidence can be found in many students' interviews (e.g. Haohao, Qianqian, Jiufu, Dengdeng, Gaogao, Dongdong, Baobao and Yuner). As Haohao shared his view:

> When I was in China, the textbook was the key knowledge resource. Students and lecturers relied on it to study and teach … most students always had plenty of books in front of their desks ... I did not use too many Internet-based technologies in my study.

Similarly, Baobao shared her experiences that there were limited applications of Internet-based technologies in her study.

> I did not use many Internet-based technologies in learning at my Chinese university. If I did, it often happened when I needed to have more understandings about a concept shown in the textbook. Then I searched for relevant information. That was all. In China, Internet-based technologies were supplementary, and they did not play the core role in my learning.

Some students also mentioned their views towards the reasons why they did not have many ICT-based learning experiences. For instance, Dengdeng attributed such situation to course design.

> I thought that the curriculum design influenced the use of Internet-based technology in the

> learning process. In China, I did not think that we had many courses that needed students to use the Internet for learning. All students always sit in a classroom and lecturers taught knowledge from the front of the classroom based on textbooks or other related resources.

Shuoshuo added that the quality of ICTs influenced students' applications.

> My previous university had an online course management system that is developed by a top research university. This system can just show necessary admin information, for example, exam time. It did not have more detailed functions and information for each course. Although we had such a system, as far as I knew, few students visited it. Before exams, some students may check relevant information and then pass it to other people. Such a system actually did not support students' learning. I can say most students only log in to the system two or three times to check exam information or fill a university survey in every semester. Furthermore, the system usually frequently crashed, which made it become more difficult to use. This situation indicated that the establishment and maintenance of such a system were not of high quality and techniques were very low. As a result, no one used it anymore because it was too terrible to be used effectively, which was trouble for learning.

However, many students suggested that the Internet was mainly used for entertainment purposes in the Chinese context. As Dongdong suggested, "At my Chinese university, most students use the Internet as an entertainment tool." Yuner also claimed, "Internet is just a tool for fun, for example, playing games, online shopping, and watching videos. Time spending on the Internet is wasted." Gaogao indicated that there were many differences in relation to the uses of Internet-based tools between China and Australia.

> Although there was only one Internet in the world, there were many differences on the Internet between China and Australia. At my Chinese university, I did not use many Internet-based technologies in daily study. Using the Internet was mainly for entertainment. I remembered that my roommates at Chinese universities usually watched online movies, played games or chatted with other people. However, I did not remember who usually adopted Internet-based tools for learning.

According to these students' interview data, it is obvious that Internet-based technologies at some Chinese universities were not used to support students' study. However, the Internet created a virtual space for entertainment. As a result, even when some tools were available, there were limited benefits for students' learning. Textbook-based learning potentially reduced the knowledge interactions and transformations between physical place and virtual space. Furthermore, textbook-based learning might suggest that there were limited knowledge transformations in students' learning between China and Australia. These students did not have many experiences of learning knowledge that was based on the Australian curriculum or delivered by lecturers who come from the Australian university when they were in China. Hence, it seems that most students in the Chinese context did not actually enter the in-between space that is created by the usage of both physical and virtual learning tools. Rather, according to Brennan's (2006) distinction between space and place, their learning still happened mainly in Chinese physical places (e.g. classroom-based and textbook-focused learning modes). Moreover, such learning experiences suggest that many students seemed to be far away from learning in the virtual space of in-betweenness, positioned between China and Australia. However, the situation was different in Australia.

In terms of their learning in Australia, students reflected different experiences. First, most learners entered a mixed learning zone of physical place and virtual space. Their learning activities had many interactions between physical place and virtual space, which made them deeply in-between. Practically, many students created their in-between learning space via both physical and virtual intermediaries. Consequently, many students pinpointed that if they did not have the Internet-based technology for their study, learning would be difficult. For example, Baobao shared her view:

> In Australia, Internet-based tools became basic and essential partners in my study. I cannot study if there were no Internet-based tools ... I usually did not have a textbook, especially in Design related majors. All learning contents were electric versions. The Internet has become the most frequently used tool in my study.

Many other students also offered similar comments. For instance, Dongdong provided detailed examples to show his engagement in the combined learning space.

> At my Australian university, every student had an account and password to login to his/her online learning platform. In such an online environment, I can find out most course contents

> and a lot of tools that can help me to study in an efficient way, such as online time planner. Once I opened a course, much information will automatically show on the time planner, for example, location, duration, lecturers … I can also use my account to log in to the library system to borrow books and reading online at the Australian university. My Australian university's account can access external databases and the online course's website. When I want to watch some video tutorials, for example, Lydia.com, I can access this kind of website without paying a fee, and it is perfect for students. If I wanted to borrow a specific book, they also can order and hold it through the online system, which was very easy to handle. The university online learning system also allowed students to select their courses, pay tuition and book meeting rooms. In general, at the Australian university, I can do most of the things through the university website and online learning platform. However, for me, when I was in China, I remembered that I viewed the university website no more than 5 times because I think I cannot find out valuable information from the university website or platform for my daily study.

These examples illustrated a general picture of the application of Internet-based tools in learning at Australian universities. It is apparent that these students' learning seemed to move into a combined in-between learning space rather than a physically dominant mode. Furthermore, they provided many examples to illustrate their learning processes (e.g. before, in, and after classes) in the in-between space of the combination of physical and virtual contexts. For instance, Shuoshuo noted that he usually previewed course contents during learning.

> I usually used Blackboard to preview the course content and prepare my learning plan. It was convenient for me to get access to course information via this platform. However, I did not do this work when I was in China.

Shuoshuo's experience initially suggested that he adopted ICT-based tools to assist his preview, which potentially made his learning activities happen in both a physical place and a virtual space. Considering the activities in class, many students reflected that their learning happened in between physical place and virtual space as well. For example, Lamei provided an example:

> For some courses in Electric System management, many lecturers from the business school

> usually adopted Internet-based technology to teach, such as video, online interactive communication tools, professional websites and mobile apps … Students could participate in learning and teaching processes with lecturers together rather than only listening.

When discussing the application of Internet-based technology after class, most students identified that it was essential to use such tools to review course contents and complete assignments. For example, Qianqian outlined his experience:

> I usually followed the lecturers' teaching and review course content regularly. I used the Blackboard to download lecture slides. Sometimes I listened to the recording if I missed a class. I also did assignments online and searched for some definitions of Finance which were hard to be understood in class.

Qianqian's learning experience indicated that ICT-based tools holistically permeate his learning process. Similarly, Lamei reported her learning experiences.

> At my Australian university, all learning content was uploaded to an online learning system, which helped me to review taught knowledge and enhance understanding easily. During writing an essay or doing another assignment, I did need to use Internet-based technology as the primary tool to help me complete my work, for example, searching for articles on Google Scholar.

These research interview extracts illustrate a picture of the differences in learning place and space in the transition from China to Australia. Specifically, students' Chinese experiences suggested a physically dominated learning place without in-depth virtual-based activities. In this place, learning was considered as textbook-dominated, and ICTs were supplementary for most students. Consequently, it seems that the first two years of study were mainly conducted in a physical place with more focus on traditional learning resources (e.g. textbooks).

In contrast, as the selected data has shown above, ICTs were widely adopted to support learning and teaching in the Australian context, especially in students' daily study. Hence, learners seemed to start learning in an in-between space that combined both features of physical and virtual contexts. Their experiences showed apparent differences when compared with the Chinese context.

It seemed that many students studied in a blended context that combined both physical and virtual educational settings. In doing so, students were able to really engage in an in-between space rather than solely rely on physical contexts and resources.

5.3.1.2 ICT-mediated in-between space for knowledge interactions between China and Australia.

Many students made use of Internet-based tools to have close connections with the Chinese context when they studied in Australia. Internet-based tools became an vital bridge to position these students in-between China and Australia. In short, although these students physically studied and lived in Australia, they had close connections with the Chinese contexts. According to Harvey (1999), time and space have been compressed via the broad application of Internet-based technologies. In this compressed virtual space, students achieved knowledge transformations and interactions between different educational and cultural contexts. Interview data demonstrated evidence to illustrate the construction of an ICT-based in-between learning space. For example, in this study, almost every student mentioned that their most significant learning stress was due to the issue of the English language. For instance, Haohao observed: "For Chinese students whose first language is not English, the learning pressures are much higher than Australian students." Dongdong also suggested that language is one of the most challenging barriers in his study.

> The hardest thing for me to overcome was the language. It took me a long time to adapt to the local learning environment. Importantly, it was difficult to find out a fast way to deal with such language problems. The only thing can do was to use the language, more reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Due to English language issues, many students made use of Internet-based tools to overcome language barriers. For example, Qihao suggested, "I usually searched relevant Chinese information from the Internet to help me understand English meanings". Similarly, Dengdeng further explained that Internet-based tools could provide a useful platform to investigate and to understand specific knowledge in her field.

> I usually made use of Internet-based tools, for example, online directory, professional website, and search engine, to help me understand professional concepts. Many concepts were difficult to understand in English, so I searched for them in Chinese to help me deeply

> comprehend the real meaning. Furthermore, there are plenty of academic papers and resources online. It was beneficial to me to understand knowledge by searching Chinese information. Moreover, I usually checked my grammar through online English learning platforms. Internet-based technology actually helped me to overcome many language problems.

These experiences reveal that Internet-based tools became supportive assistants that helped students to overcome language barriers to some extent. Specifically, some students even searched information on Chinese resources as a way to deal with language and understanding issues. Such activities further confirmed that technology became an vital mediation to shorten the distance between this student diaspora and their homeland (Rizvi et al., 2016). Importantly, such technology not only connected the diaspora with the homeland but also played significant roles in knowledge transformations from Chinese to English and vice versa, which in a sense created a learning space without the boundaries of places. Studying in this space, students experienced learning in "a world of instantaneous communication and virtuality" (Brennan as cited in Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 66).

ICT-based learning experiences not only helped students to deal with English issues as mediation of knowledge transformation but also created an in-between virtual learning space for many students to achieve knowledge communication between China and Australia. For example, Qianqian shared his experiences:

> When I was studying in a finance course, I found it difficult to understand some key knowledge points. Although I thought language was not the primary problem, the discipline knowledge was tough for me to understand in some cases deeply. To deal with these learning issues, I found a Chinese MOOC website was beneficial, which is called "163 public lecture". In this MOOC platform, I could watch many teaching recorded videos in Chinese. So, I can learn detailed knowledge by following both Chinese and foreign lecturers. Many courses were taught by famous professors from universities around the world. I felt such a platform was conducive to my study.

Such ICT-based learning as supportive examples was also mentioned by other students. For instance, Qihao indicated that he attended online courses to help him deal with learning difficulties.

> In the WeChat platform, some educational companies offer services for teaching students professional knowledge, for example, Accounting. I tried some courses, but I noticed that there were many differences in knowledge between what I learned in the classroom and the online courses. However, much of the foundation knowledge was the same. So I can learn such knowledge via these online courses to help me deeply understand taught contents.

More specifically, Jiufu further explained the role of ICTs in helping him acquire information to in the Australian stage of his programme.

> ICTs was not very helpful when I was in China. However, I can gain much information in the Australian context. Everyone knows Google, YouTube but for Chinese students, he or she may not know how to search for information effectively in English. If you use Chinese in Google, results are displayed from Baidu. In this case, why do we use Google rather than Baidu directly?

From these research interview excerpts, it is clear that many students had close and ongoing connections with Chinese resources and people in their learning when they were studying in Australia. Importantly, they made use of different Internet-based tools to create a virtual in-between space for their study. In this in-between space, they not only learned knowledge in the Australian physical places (e.g. classroom and campus) via many ICT-assistances but also sought further virtual support from the Chinese side to help overcome learning difficulties and to understand major knowledge. It seems that ICTs to some extent allow and enable a combination of space and place without any time and boundary restrictions (Brennan, 2006; Harvey, 1999).

The students' experiences indicated that their intercultural learning happened in an in-between space rather than merely moving from one country to another. The findings also suggested that the Internet became an vital mediation for Chinese students to keep in touch with the Chinese contexts. They even adopted more Chinese-based resources than non-Chinese content when studying overseas (C. Yang, Wu, Zhu, Brian, & Southwell, 2004). Furthermore, their Australian stories indicated stronger engagement in both vertical and horizontal in-between spaces than was the case with their Chinese experiences, which were mainly physically dominated without sufficient connections with the Australian contexts. Consequently, many students created their ICT-based in-between space when they studied in Australia. In this space, their learning became interactively in-between.

5.3.1.3 I studied in between the physical place and virtual space.

The above analysis focused on the construction of in-between from the perspectives of relationships between physical place and virtual space. The physical place is a metaphor to refer to a limited ICT-assisted or traditional learning context. As the data indicated, many learning activities in the Chinese stage seemed to happen in a physical place with limited virtually based experiences. In contrast, students' experiences indicated a strong sense of in-between of the physical place and virtual space in the Australian stage of their programmes. Their learning seemed to become very much in-between. Moreover, they had many connections with China via ICT-based tools, which created a virtual space of knowledge transformation and cross-system communication. It seemed that when they actually studied and lived in a foreign context, the in-between features become much more apparent than in the home context.

When I considered my own learning experiences in the move from China to Australia, I noticed that I had a similar journey as my participants in the Chinese context. When I was studying in my Chinese university nearly eight years ago, I did not have intensive ICT-based learning experiences in general. Although my major was also related to technology, the use of ICTs, especially the Internet-based tools (e.g. online learning system) was not prevalent. I distinctly remembered that my university did not have even a functional online learning system. The university website did not have any educational content directly related to my study. The university website only displayed news and other general administrative information. Even on the campus, students did not have Wi-Fi access. It seemed that the development and applications of Internet-based technology were at a starting point. Therefore, I was studying in a very traditional learning place without powerful ICT-based interventions due to the developmental issues with ICTs.

However, when I heard my interviewees' experiences some six years later, it seemed the situation had not changed. They still experienced limited ICT-based learning, even though the Internet-based technology has rapidly developed in the past years. Their experiences might indicate that with the constant development of ICTs, the 2+2 programme in the Chinese phase seemed not to pay enough attention to ICT-based learning. Although ICTs are no longer new for most Chinese students, the educational uses of ICTs in their daily study seemed to be at a low level, which ensured these students had limited understanding of the real value of ICTs as learning tools.

Considering my Australian experience, I did not have a strong sense of ICT-based in-between learning when I started my last two years of study in Australia. Although I was able to use Blackboard and other ICT-based tools when I started learning at my Australian university, I did not have strong connections with China via ICTs in both learning and living. I remembered that there were limited online resources or services that I could use to support my Australian study. Even though I was able to watch some professional videos online, the quality was inferior compared with the current dynamic resources. The major learning activities were Australia-based without enough support from China. In daily life, it was impossible to have a video chat with families and friends via a mobile phone. I needed to make phone calls by paying expensive fees. Generally, I feel I was really isolated from my homeland when I started my Australian study.

With the development of ICTs, especially mobile technology and MOOCs, I feel that I actually have many in-between experiences now, especially while studying for my PhD programme. For learning, I attended many courses via live-video online platforms. For example, I learned NVivo and SPSS from professors of Peking University via an online classroom. Taking such courses, I now have a deep understanding of research methods and skills. Language barriers were not the major issues for me to learn knowledge from China. However, such learning experiences offered me opportunities to know what has been taught in a top research-based Chinese university. I was able to learn from the best Chinese professors without paying much more money. I can reflect and compare what I learned from Australian and the Chinese content. In doing so, I now have close connections with some aspects of the Chinese academic field. Such experiences are in line with findings concluded by K. Kim, Yun, and Yoon (2009), who suggested that the Internet is a hybrid space that allows diaspora to mediate and negotiate their home and host culture and society. In this process, I felt that although I am physically studying in Australia, I can easily access and connect with my home country. Such experiences made me feel that I am studying in the ICT-based in-between space where intercultural learners have to negotiate with new educational contexts.

5.3.2 The in-between space of assessment modes.

When students were asked reasons why they had such a different sense of agency, identity, and belonging, most spontaneously linked their changes to the following keywords, such as “exams”, “assignments” and “criteria”. Therefore, I realised that assessment differences played an important role in positioning students into the in-between space. As Boud, Cohen, and Sampson (1999) claimed,

"assessment is the single most powerful influence on learning in formal courses" (p. 413). Boud et al. (1999) further suggested that the design of assessment can easily influence the strategies of teaching and learning approaches. According to interview data, the different assessment modes between Chinese and Australian systems provided students opportunities to change their agency and identity as intercultural learners. The assessment differences become one of the most important motivators in shaping the 2+2 in-between learning space, where students compared the Chinese and Australian assessment modes and dynamically changed their strategies to study in the two different systems. Students' experiences of different assessment systems are the second layer of the in-between space that is illustrated by comparing and negotiating Chinese and Australian modes.

5.3.2.1 Studying in an exam-dominated physical place.

An exam-dominated assessment mode potentially ensured that many students engaged only in a physical learning place in the Chinese stage of their programmes. As many interviewees indicated, learning was highly guided by exams, which pushed them to focus on physical materials in the daily study without enough exploration and interaction with virtual space. For instance, Yuner indicated that memorising documents and books became one of her experienced learning skills in the Chinese stage.

> For example, my lecturers usually give us "30cm high" printed slides to remember before an exam. I remembered that I could memorise a book within one week before the exam date and then passed tests with a high score.

Studying in such highly exam-dominated space, Shuoshuo seemed to be weary of such an assessment mode.

> The exams of my Chinese university were very rigid. Such exams did not test academic ability, but they just tested out-of-date knowledge printed on the textbook. To pass exams, I just needed to remember textbooks and do more practices before the final test. In short, if I directly copied the contents of the textbook to my exam paper, I can pass it easily.

This experience confirmed a well-documented finding that assessments shape "how much, how (their approach), and what (the content) students learn" (Scouller, 1998, p. 454). Furthermore, their experiences suggested that the "end-of-course" examination was still widely adopted as the

dominant assessment approaches in the first two years of undergraduate Chinese study (Scouller, 1998). In line with the use of ICTs in the Chinese stage, it seemed that such an assessment mode ensured students had limited engagement with the ICT-based virtual space in doing their academic tasks. Consequently, their learning activities mainly happened in physical places. To illustrate the limited in-between communication in the Chinese stage, Jiaojiao shared her experiences with assessments in her programme.

> Although most courses were taught by foreign lecturers in English, I feel their assessment approaches were Chinese-style. They did not give us assignments or quizzes in learning progress. We usually just have mid-semester and final exams. During the whole semester, there was limited interaction or other creative teaching and learning contents. All courses relied on very exam-directed learning and teaching method.

Jiaojiao's interview excerpt indicates an exciting issue in the 2+2 context. Foreign lecturers taught in the Chinese stage, which indicated the academic movement from a foreign country to China. Such movement actually produced an in-between learning space for these Chinese students in the Chinese stage. Theoretically, this mode should allow students to experience different teaching and assessment approaches in advance of the move to the new system. A multi-cultural context was successfully constructed in Jiaojiao's class at her Chinese university. However, as Jiaojiao suggested, it seems that there were few differences in teaching strategies that were adopted by foreign or Chinese lecturers.

Practically, such an in-between space was not sufficient for her to experience different educational features in the Chinese stage. Specifically, in contrast, it seemed that foreign lecturers adapted to the Chinese system as they also adopted exam-dominated assessments to test students' learning. These experiences made Jiaojiao identify that she did not engage in a real in-between learning space of combination of Chinese and real foreign education even though many lecturers came from overseas. In short, her experiences illustrated a theoretical in-between space in the Chinese context, but practically she was actually studying in a traditional Chinese mode.

5.3.2.2 In-between multiple assessments.

When these students moved to Australia, they started to engage in a dynamic space of assessment. In the process of adjusting to the Australian assessment mode, they spontaneously compared their Australian and Chinese experiences. These comparisons indicated various interactions of their thoughts and practices about the differences between China and Australia in this respect. Their views towards the assessment differences and strategies to deal with the problems in doing assignments indicated that they were motivated to study in a real in-between space in Australia, where they were able to adopt various approaches to solve learning barriers.

On the one hand, multiple assessment approaches created a dynamic space for students to engage in different tasks that they did not experience in the Chinese stage. For instance, Yuner suggested that she had various types of assessments during learning at an Australian university, which brought more learning pressures to her.

> Compared to my previous Chinese exam-based mode, I had various tests (e.g. essay, exam, online quiz, group work, and presentation) during a semester at the Australian university and then I needed to keep following lecturers and read lecture notes after class on the learning platform. If I did not study hard in the semester, it would be difficult for me to complete assignments and pass exams.

As Boud and Soler (2016) suggested, it is vital to position assessments into students' learning activities to build a sustainable assessment system. According to Yuner's experiences, it seemed that different types of assignments and tests were adopted as assessment methods across her learning in Australia. Similarly, Shuoshuo also mentioned that different types of tests were used in his programme.

> In Australia, the assessment had various types and many tests aimed at examining daily study. For example, we had essays, online quizzes, a mid-exam and a final exam. This assessing mode could test students' learning and academic ability from various points rather than only just textbook contents.

Learning with such a stressful assessment mode, many students seemed to pay much attention to the daily study rather than rely on the final review before exams. For example, Lamei described her experiences:

> When I was in my first semester, I relied on working hard before the final exam. However, I did not get good scores, and one subject was failed. I noticed I could not keep doing this activity again. I needed to study for the whole semester … In China, I was used to making a concentrated effort to finish learning quickly before each exam. Not many students keep working hard during a semester. In Australia, it was difficult for me to get a good result if I did not study hard during the whole semester. For me, I did need to study nearly every day to review course contents and do more research. I felt I had a lot of assignments to complete during a semester from beginning to the end. Meanwhile, lecturers also let us complete mini quizzes. All such tasks pushed me to study hard actively. Otherwise it was so hard to get an excellent academic record.

Lamei's experiences indicated her Chinese learning approaches to deal with assessments did not work well at her Australian university. In a highly stressful learning space, she needed to study hard to complete assessments in order to obtain high academic results. It seemed that the Australian assessment mode made her change learning strategies and attitudes for learning rather than just focus on passing exams.

In particular, many students from the Design and Engineering field suggested that they also had other types of tasks rather than only creating design works. For example, Haohao claimed that he had many group-based tasks in his study.

> In Australia, we have a lot of group work. When students work together, they usually have various opinions on a specific topic. I feel group work is one of the most significant learning and teaching approaches in my Australian study. However, I did not have too many experiences of doing group works at my Chinese university. So when I came to Australia, I felt I was good at doing group works with other students.

More particularly, Baobao argued that she needed not only to create her design works innovatively but also to present her ideas in class.

> Through presentation, I can know other peers' design ideas. Sometimes, I needed to do many peer-reviews to evaluate design works for other students on the basis of their assignments and presentations. This approach not only examines students' design work but also assesses presentation skills. To have a professional presentation, it also needed me to have creative ideas to design slides by using different tools, for example, PPT, Prezi or other innovative skills. I think it is constructive for me to foster my communication ability rather than only design knowledge.

These experiences indicated the critical relationships between peer learning and assessments (Boud et al., 1999). No matter whether it's Haohao's group work experiences or Baobao's peer assessments, their positive feelings indicated that peer or group types of learning activities and assessments are valuable. According to Boud et al. (1999), "peer learning values cooperation over competition and greater respect for varied experiences and background of participants can occur" (p. 415). In this mode, students seemed to have more opportunities to self-evaluate their own study by interacting with other students in the classroom where different cultural backgrounds were exchanged, which potentially influenced their learning strategies.

On the other hand, many students' strategies to deal with assignment issues indicated a strong sense of in-between learning in their intercultural study at the Australian university. For example, Jiufu mentioned that he could seek help from Chinese friends when he faced difficulties in doing assignments.

> I remembered when I was in my first semester I had no ideas about doing assignments and totally cannot understand what I needed to do. As I said, what I had learned from Chinese university was not helpful to my Australian study. It was so difficult to let a video editor create a website, which was an impossible work. In this case, I requested help from lecturers, and they gave me some guidance to complete my assignments. If I cannot get help from lecturers, I also asked peers and some friends from China who have relevant experiences to help me deal with learning problems.

Gaogao further explained her understandings of academic tasks.

> Assignments or exams were always more difficult than the taught knowledge. To achieve

> a high mark in exams or deep understanding of course content, I must become an investigator of knowledge and have progressive attitudes to study. Internet-based technology is one of the most essential tools for me to become an active learner. I needed to make use of the Internet strategically in my study to acquire different resources from both Chinese and foreign websites and databases. Without Internet-based technology, I think that it is so difficult for me to have profound learning experiences at an Australian university.

Based on the analysis of collected data, it is evident that the changes in assessment modes significantly influenced many participants' intercultural learning experiences. The different assessment features of China and Australia created different learning places and spaces for these students. As the data showed, the Australian assessment mode made many students engage in a sophisticated learning space, which brought more stress to them than the Chinese system. Their learning strategies became dynamic in this multiple assessment modes. Meanwhile, their strategies to deal with these tasks potentially shaped the in-between space of assessment. In this space, they not only needed to pay more attention to daily study but also needed to have more connections with their homeland via ICTs to solve assessment problems.

5.3.2.3 Assessments shape in-between space.

Assessments not only are approaches that evaluate students' learning and facilitate further efforts if possible, but are also useful tools to establish the 2+2 in-between learning space. Considering my own experience of studying in different assessment modes from China to Australia, I did believe that the changes of assessment methods were essential to motivate many Chinese students, including me, to make changes in learning strategies and attitudes when we studied in the 2+2 in-between space. In the changing process, some students could adjust to the new assessment culture, but many peers may have felt stressed in the new context. These various attitudes and strategies for dealing with assessment change definitely suggested that individuals had different intercultural competences.

On the one hand, I had similar experiences with my participants in the Chinese stage. When I was in my Chinese learning stage, I also did not pay enough attention to dealing with assessments. It seemed that the assessment was just one academic symbol to show the programme had some

educational features, rather than a useful strategy to motivate me to study hard. I felt that one of the reasons that made the assessment seem of little value to many Chinese students was that the academic rules seemed to be not very strict. In this case, I was in an informal learning context that motivated learners to focus on exams without other types of assessments. Therefore, it was difficult to experience a multiple and dynamic in-between space of assessment when I was in China.

On the other hand, I felt that these Chinese 2+2 students, including me, were the actual creators of the in-between space under the Australian assessment system. As I mentioned above, I did not really care about the assessment when I was in China. However, after coming to Australia, I started to realise the importance of carefully completing each assignment on time at reasonable quality. The workload increased, which made me feel stressed. Importantly, to deal with such stress, I started to think about every possible approach that might help me to complete each task. In this process, communications with the Chinese context was one of my important strategies. For instance, I was not familiar with using Adobe Photoshop to edit pictures and create complicated effects. Learning-related knowledge via Chinese websites and resources helped me to solve various problems effectively. Through such strategies, first, there were no language barriers to learning Chinese based knowledge. Second, there were a lot of useful resources, which I was able to use without problems. In doing so, I learned various skills and techniques through such communications in the virtual space in dealing with different assignment issues.

As many participants indicated, even though we did not have many experiences of overcoming assessment issues via in-between strategies in the Chinese stage, we did create and develop the in-between space when we came to Australia by adopting different approaches in order to survive in the new system and further to develop our strong sense of agency to overcome learning difficulties. Such adaptations potentially reshaped most students' sense of identity from passive listeners to active explorers in the move from China to Australia. Importantly, learning activities, especially dealing with assessments, happened in a space that allowed students to dynamically interact with different people, resources, and places rather than highly rely on one source, the textbook. Therefore, the changes in assessment from China to Australia actually illustrated a route of creating an in-between learning space from a physical dominated space. Such in-betweenness included both an Internet-physical mode and home-host country knowledge interaction.

5.3.3 The in-between space of teaching strategies.

When participants discussed the role of assessment in shaping their in-between learning space, many of them also comparatively mentioned their views of lecturers in the Chinese and Australian context. According to Boud et al. (1999), assessments not only influenced students' learning approaches but also reflect teaching features. Based on the analysis of my data, I noticed that many differences in teaching strategies emerged from students' intercultural learning experiences. The different teaching strategies also allowed students to consider the values and issues in their study across two systems. Importantly, teaching differences offered opportunities for students to express their views in relation to constructing the 2+2 in-between learning space.

Research has shown the close connections between teaching strategies and learning approaches (e.g. Biggs, 1999; Marton & Säaljö, 1976; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Trigwell, Prosser, & Waterhouse, 1999). These researchers also summarised a series of types of teaching (e.g. teacher-centred and student-centred) and learning (e.g. surface and deep learning) approach. However, it is difficult to say that teachers and students always adopted the same strategies in teaching and learning activities as they could change methods depending on different contexts. In this section, I will adopt some of these theoretical ideas to help me analyse the significant features of teaching and learning in students' 2+2 intercultural study. However, I will not simply label participants' experiences by using these terms. Instead, I will analyse the changes in teaching strategies from multiple perspectives (e.g. teaching and learning relations, and cultural differences) to illustrate how students constructed their in-between space of teaching strategies.

5.3.3.1 Lecturer-dominated learning in physical places.

According to my analysis of interview data, the role of lecturers in the Chinese stage can be summarised through the following keywords, including teaching activity dominator, textbook-based knowledge delivery, and exam-based assessor. A series of interview extracts showed evidence of these features related to teaching strategies of many lecturers in the Chinese stage. For instance, Jiaojiao pinpointed her experiences about the role of lecturers in classrooms.

> At my Chinese university, many lecturers were still the centre of the class. They were in charge of teaching and learning activities. Most courses did not provide opportunities for students to do some works by themselves after class.

Dengdeng also had a similar view that her lecturers usually dominated the learning process and students had limited autonomy. Following lecturers in the classroom was the chief learning mode.

> When I was studying at my Chinese university, learning was usually based on lecturers' teaching. They often controlled the learning and teaching activities. Students usually needed to follow their steps without enough autonomy.

From a specific cultural perspective, these interview extracts indicated the sense of large power distances in their Chinese learning stage. According to Hofstede (1986), power distances refer to "the extent to which the less powerful persons in a society accept inequity in power and consider it as normal" (p. 307). Some researchers have claimed that the Chinese society shows considerable power distance. In education, lecturers played dominant roles in teaching and learning activities, which position students as listeners (Hofstede, 1986).

Through analysing students' English study features via the lens of Chinese culture of learning, Jin and Cortazzi (2006) found that listening and watching seemed to be the dominant way of learning for many Chinese students at both school and university levels. They further indicated that students usually learn from authorities (e.g. teachers and textbooks) in the Confucius Heritage Culture (CHC) context (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). Notably, this feature was also reflected by Jiaojiao who identified that even though foreign lecturers taught some courses, their teaching approaches seemed to be very Chinese in style. Such experiences probably indicate that these foreign lecturers seemed to adjust to the CHC context. Interestingly, the CHC features still played dominant roles in the teaching process in many 2+2 programmes. It has constant and deep influences on these students and lecturers' understanding of teaching and learning under the 2+2 setting.

With regard to the role of lecturers and the application of technology in teaching, many students (e.g. Gaogao, Dongdong, Shuoshuo and Haohao) thought that many lecturers did not adopt various technologies to support their teaching activities. For example, Gaogao shared her experiences:

> Most lecturers were used to teaching by reading the textbook. The learning goal in China was to remember the key sections of the textbook that were mentioned by lecturers in class and then to catch these points to pass the final exam. It seemed that students mechanically followed the lecturers without doing their own thinking. So in Chinese mode, I only needed

> to focus on the textbook and did not need to pay more attention to other kinds of learning strategies, for example, Internet-based study. As a result, it was difficult to evaluate the role of Internet-based technology in helping students achieve their goals because students do not even use it for learning purposes … Generally, Internet-based technology always seemed to be "extra contents" in learning. The teacher was still the centre of the classroom.

Such teaching strategies indicated some features of teaching in the CHC context. For instance, Jin and Cortazzi (2006) suggested that teaching commonly refers to "*Jiao Shu*" (*教书*) or "teach the book" (p. 11). Although the concept of the book is a metaphor, it still indicates that the knowledge of books in the Chinese culture of education played an important role. The above research interview extracts partly reflected the significant roles of "books" in students' first two years of study at Chinese universities. Furthermore, it seemed that exam-directed teaching approaches guided students to study by following the line of examination. These experiences further indicated that teaching and learning approaches were profoundly influenced by assessment (Boud et al., 1999). In this educational context, many students were able to pass assessments easily by focusing on learning textbooks-based knowledge.

The interview excerpts indicated a clear picture of students' views towards the Chinese teaching strategies. On the one hand, these features of the Chinese teaching style reflect various conventional characteristics of teaching and learning relationships. On the other hand, students' views towards such teaching strategies revealed that the learning space in the Chinese stage was also traditional in most 2+2 programmes. It seemed that there were limited communications and interactions in teaching between the Chinese and Australian contexts. However, their experiences illustrated a clear picture of how such teaching strategies shaped the physical and traditional space for the learners.

5.3.3.2 Studying in an in-between space but yearning for the past.

Students' views towards the teaching strategies adopted by their Australian lecturers revealed various differences compared with their previous Chinese experiences. By summarising the major insights of the interview data related to teaching strategies in the Australian stage, I noticed that the followings keywords described the features of many Australian lecturers' teaching, such as teaching activity facilitator, knowledge exploration guider, and practice-based assessor.

Many students identified that the Australian teaching mode offered them more spaces to explore knowledge by themselves. For instance, Gaogao noted that her Australian lecturers usually motivated students to deal with learning problems actively through various tools, rather than teach detailed knowledge directly.

> Compared to my Chinese lecturers, many Australian lecturers usually stimulated students to think of learning problems critically and creatively. They rarely taught students how to create an animation step by step, but they liked to discuss with students about their ideas. Students needed to develop their software skills by themselves after classes by searching for online information and watching tutorial videos. Lecturers may not be interested in the steps or skills that were used in creation, but they preferred to examine the design ideas. In this case, students in the Australian context seemed to be more creative. We needed to train ourselves to be more creative rather than waiting to be "fed" knowledge by lecturers. Australian lecturers liked to ask questions or gave various small tasks during learning to let students practice their thinking and skills.

Gaogao also outlined her understandings on the influences of different teaching strategies on her learning approaches between her Chinese and Australian experiences.

> When I was at my Chinese university, I did not realise whether or not the Chinese learning strategies were good or bad for my Australian learning. This is because we were educated in such approaches for a long time. Until I studied in Australia, I noticed the importance of self-regulated learning in my study because Australian lecturers usually did not teach students knowledge mechanically and most of them preferred to guide students and let them think creatively. This mode motivated my brain to think and create ideas rather than rely on other people. Such learning and teaching approaches were one of the most different aspects of my transnational study experiences.

Similarly, Dongdong provided his opinions on the teaching approaches used by lecturers at his Australian university.

> When I just came to Australia, I felt it was difficult for me to adapt to such a teaching approach because I was used to listening and following lecturers' ideas. In most Chinese

> students' mind, lecturers were the authority on their subjects. As students, I just needed to follow what the lecturers taught in the classroom. However, when I studied in Australia, I noticed that although there were many different principles that students needed to follow when creating something, the idea and creativity should be free rather than restricted by lecturers … In Australia, lecturers did not tell students a standard result or answer for a question. They liked to provide different roots to students and let students complete design works creatively. Most of them liked to discuss problems with students and to let students make the decision on creating their own design work. They gave a lot of room to students and let them design their own works. So, I needed to plan the idea, to think what kind of story was in the design work, to decide what kind of model will be used. I can say this mode was highly creative and students needed to do more explorations at the Australian university.

These comments provide evidence that many lecturers in the Australian context did not directly "feed knowledge" to students. In contrast, they usually provided flexible directions for students in order to encourage them to actively explore knowledge through research and investigation by using different tools. As Dongdong summarised, "I felt my Australian lecturers liked to encourage students to think ideas creatively, but in China, more teaching focused on the knowledge itself." According to these experiences, it is apparent that many students had more individual space in learning at their Australian universities. However, although teaching mainly concentrated on textbooks and exams in the Chinese context, many students identified that lecturers usually taught knowledge in detail and in depth, which could enable students to have a clear understanding of specific content.

Many interviewees (e.g. Dongdong, Baobao, Dengdeng, Jiufu, Yuner, Haohao, and Shuoshuo) critically documented their views regarding the drawbacks of the teaching strategies that they experienced in the Australian context. For example, Dongdong described that his lecturers usually taught using the software at his Chinese university, but such learning experiences were not utilised at his Australian university.

> Lecturers usually taught software step by step and created a model for students to follow. However, when I studied at my Australian university, lecturers preferred to teach design

concepts rather than many details about the use of specific software.

Similarly, Haohao shared his experiences:

> I think lecturers usually taught knowledge in detail and explained the origin of a certain point, especially in subjects related to Math or Physics. For example, I remembered that my math lecturers usually wrote a lot of formulas to explain how the question was to be solved and explained why such a question could be solved by specific approaches. After a class, the lecturer had filled a blackboard with learning resources. I felt such a learning process was very understandable. Students can develop strong foundations of fundamental knowledge. In Australia, I felt lecturers usually did not teach such detailed knowledge and students usually needed to explore problems after classes.

Shuoshuo also pointed out that he had learned some content when he was in China, so he did not experience difficulties in learning, especially in his major courses.

> Although learning in China was passive and rote, course content seemed to be thicker than at the Australian university. I noticed I had learned a lot of content in some courses related to Finance at my Chinese university. So even though my language barriers made me slow to understand Australian lecturers' teaching, I still can know what they taught, and I did not feel such knowledge was difficult.

To explicitly explain the underlying insights of different teaching styles across the 2+2 learning process, Dengdeng shared her experience in detail:

> I did not think that I learned much knowledge in depth through the 2+2 programme even now that I was studying at an outstanding Australian university. Knowledge taught by lecturers always seems too basic and lacked deep learning … I think the knowledge that I have learned was based on the Internet rather than mainly from lecturers. Therefore, I thought this was not a very good experience ... For instance, when I was learning the 3D model course at my Chinese university, lecturers usually introduced the software in detail … However, Australian lecturers did not teach such detailed knowledge. I thought Australian lecturers might assume students already have such kind of skills or knowledge.

> In fact, many Chinese students had feelings that taught contents were too tricky to handle sometimes … Australian lecturers usually did not teach fundamental knowledge in detail, for example, the use of the software. In contrast, they preferred to teach more practical skills and knowledge. They wished students to do something by themselves through explorations rather than teaching everything to them. In this case, I found it difficult to keep following the teaching step, and learning seemed to be superficial under this circle.

These experiences provide clear evidence that many students had critical views towards the teaching in their intercultural learning process, which indicated that they did not merely believe the different teaching was better than the Chinese style. In contrast, they were able to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each approach in each stage. Their critical views of teaching strategies in the Australian context may suggest that if many learners start to complain about the quality of education, some Australian universities may lose enough attractiveness of potential international students (Zhang & Tobias, 2015). In doing so, they fostered their negotiated views towards the different teaching styles, which facilitated them to establish an in-between space in their minds.

According to these students' experiences, it seemed that no matter which major they were studying in China, their lecturers adopted similar teaching strategies, which focused on accurate knowledge delivery. After coming to Australia, students also shared some similar experiences. For instance, many Australian lecturers did not teach knowledge in detail and motivated students to do self-exploration. However, it is also important to notice that different subjects have some differences in these respects. For example, students in the Design field (or other similar "soft" fields) thought that learning content seemed to have many gaps between China and Australia, which made them stressed in transition. Meanwhile, different teaching approaches also caused some of them to struggle in dealing with knowledge gaps. Although Internet-based tools became important for the students, they seemed to have negative attitudes towards such changes in learning content and teaching approaches. However, students in the "hard sciences" (e.g. engineering that is related to math) mentioned that learning content in Australian was even easier than what they learned in China. In this case, the course content in China was supportive of them in their study in Australia, even though the teaching strategies were different as well. Based on these differences, I argue that those learning in the soft field in articulation programmes may face more cross-system differences and inconsistencies

than those studying in hard sciences, which might be seen to y have universal knowledge (e.g. math and physics).

5.3.3.3 Teaching strategies positioned me in-between different learning modes.

Based on my experiences, I generally agreed with the views of my respondents regarding the different modes of teaching in Chinese and Australian stages of the 2+2 programmes. I felt that the different teaching styles from China to Australia made students engage deeply in the space of in-between. Considering the in-between space of teaching in the Chinese stage, for instance, although many foreign lecturers visited my university and taught some fundamental contents for students, I thought that the sense of teaching was still very Chinese in style. Most of my lecturers adopted similar teaching strategies to those interviewees reported in their programmes. It seems that such a teaching-based in-between space in the Chinese stage may not be strong enough to bring fresh learning experiences to learners.

After coming to Australia, I actually did not have a strong sense of non-adaptation to the new teaching experience compared with many research interviewees. In my programmes, many Australian lecturers were still adopting the traditional approaches to teaching. Students were also listening in most cases. However, I identified many detailed differences along my learning journey. For instance, many lecturers became facilitators, especially in my last year of study when I needed to create my graduate design works. They gave students enough autonomy to do their own work. Based on my experiences, I think the teaching changes in the 2+2 programmes also depended on the stage of learning. In the first two years, teaching usually focused on foundational knowledge that lecturers did need to teach carefully. In this case, students seemed to be the passive listener. When they came to Australia, they started advanced stages of learning. In this stage, lecturers may use more open approaches to teaching rather than merely delivering knowledge. Therefore, I felt that the transition of teaching mode from China to Australia actually reflected the stage of learning.

In this process, I also realised the issues of teaching strategies in the Australian context. Compared to other aspects of shaping an in-between space for these students (e.g. ICT and assessment), teaching strategies are more complicated because each individual student and lecturer is different. Therefore, it is difficult to clearly show how students approached the teaching differences via interactions between their home and host countries. However, as the data showed, their views and

opinions produced an in-between space that allowed them to critically evaluate the teaching quality and style depending on individual situations. For me, I had the similar contradictory sense in my learning process. Depending on different cases, I may have different preferences for teaching styles, which also influenced my capability to deal with learning problems. Therefore, my mind was divided into two spaces. However, I usually switched my views between the different teaching strategies and gained multiple and complex learning experiences in this hybrid context. I believe it is essential for both Chinese and Australian lecturers to carefully consider students' learning requirement and design some teaching models that could help students to adjust to becoming in-between learners who can get more benefit from this 2+2 intercultural learning process.

5.3.4 The in-between space of the university contexts.

According to the analysis of interview data, I realised that learners' understandings of different teaching, learning, and assessment systems in their 2+2 programmes actually produce a holistic picture of their in-between movements between China and Australia. All their views, experiences, and behaviours actually reflected how they adjusted in the 2+2 in-between space. To conceptualise this holistic sense of in-between learning, I considered that the university context could be a suitable actor that might produce a network that connects different actants and places. Finally, the 2+2 in-between learning space is constructed, which allows learners to dynamically experience and move between their home and host countries from physical, virtual and physiological aspects.

The university context is a more holistic concept in the 2+2 in-between learning space. As Ramsden (1979) suggested, the university context could include various actors, such as teaching, courses set, and rules. Hence, it is apparent that the concept of learning environment is too complicated to measure in detail holistically. To add further insights into the analysis of constructing the 2+2 in-between learning space, I will focus on several actants in the general academic culture rather than cover all different aspects.

5.3.4.1 Studying as a member of a collective university cultural context.

Considering the meaning of in-between from the perspectives of university context, I noticed that these Chinese students actually studied and lived in a highly connective environment. In this environment, students' learning and living in the university indicated a strong sense of collective features. In doing so, they have more opportunities to interact with each other. Such interactions as a

collective group made students in-between each other without a strong sense of their individuality. For instance, Shuoshuo shared his views on the collective features of his Chinese university.

> In China, most students in the same major had the same course plan. Students did not need to manage their course and learning plan independently … Students usually attended class as a fixed group. No matter which course they selected, most classmates were all the same group. In this case, many students may want to rely on other peers. One student searched and knew learning contents first. Then he/she will let other students know about it. So students did not have the motivation to study by themselves and became lazy.

Yuner also reported a similar experience.

> In China, students usually lived together and were in the same class. Students had more connections in such a mode. The friendship was easy to be established compared to my Australian experiences. If I had problems with study and life, other students also helped me to deal with them without many barriers as we were in the same learning mode and life context.

These interview extracts provided evidence to shed light on Hofstede's (1986) argument that the Chinese society had a strong sense of collectivist features. Haohao summarised his views on the features of the Chinese university context in the following way:

> My Chinese university is considered to be a semi-enclosed society. Students have their autonomy, but they still need to follow specific rules.

It is apparent that learners in a highly collective context are always in between different members in a semi-fixed group. As Yuner identified, one of the significant advantages of such a construction of in-between was the tight connections with other group members. However, many interviewees suggested some disadvantages in this situation. For instance, Qihao felt that "the quality of students determined the quality of the learning context." Jiaojiao shared her experiences:

> At my Chinese university, I feel many students did not care too much about their academic results. Some peers usually failed in their exams but they seemed to not worry about it. Some students even did not submit assignments as usual.

Such feeling was not unique amongst research participants. Other interviewees also reported similar experiences. As Yuner noted,

> Generally, my Chinese university environment was not suitable for study, and most classmates did not study very hard. In such a context, it was difficult to be independent. When other people play games, why should I study?

During my analysis, I noted that Haohao's interview provided more details about the learning context to explain why many peers did not focus on study in China.

> In China, many students found it difficult to be admitted to a university and accessible to graduate. Students had no pressures to study once they were admitted to a university … Most students at Chinese universities lack enough motivation to study, and some of them are still passive learners because the university context is too flexible … They only have pressures for one week before the final exam.

Haohao's arguments suggested that students needed to study hard for preparing for the university entrance exam. Once they were admitted to a university, graduations seemed to be an easy task. As a result, they might lack learning pressures and motivation. Haohao's experiences were also found in a study by J. Zhu (2016), who argued that many Chinese students were educated in an extremely tight educational context in school due to the pressures of *Gao Kao*. Hence, a negative atmosphere potentially influenced many students' views of the learning context with an impact on their behaviours. As Ramsden (1997) indicated, students' learning orientations and their learning approaches were significantly influenced by the academic atmosphere of their learning context. Such experiences indicated that when peers did not have positive attitudes towards daily study, their collective learning context could lack an academic atmosphere.

In this case, many learners were passively positioned in a negative in-between space when they were in China. The in-between space in the Chinese context was mainly created by the collective features of the university context. In this space, as the data above showed, students interacted with each actant in a semi-closed setting where in-between activities usually occurred. However, when these students came to Australia, the sense of in-between became more complicated than that of their Chinese experiences.

5.3.4.2 Entering into an individualistic context with a sense of isolation.

The construction of in-between learning space at the Australian university was based on students' multiple experiences of their interactions with the new context as intercultural learners. As the section title indicates, I noticed that many students actually became in-between learners who have both Chinese and Australian educational genes, as it were. When they were in China, as they suggested above, they were used to a collective context. Learning in this space, they spontaneously become a member of the specific fixed group. However, when they came to Australia, most of them were divided into different individuals even though they might study in the same 2+2 programme.

As results in Chapter 4 suggested, many learners (e.g. Haohao, Shuoshuo, Dongdong, Dengdeng, Gaogao, Baobao, and Lamei) felt that they became individuals after coming to Australia. It was difficult for them always to have the similar fixed group as they had experienced in the previous Chinese context. For example, Haohao shared:

> In Australia, I felt I have already started my life in an open society. I was not just a learner at university; I also needed to become more independent and to manage every aspect of my life and study, especially for me in Australia. I needed to learn how to communicate with others, how to adapt to society, and how to deal with every problem that I faced.

Shuoshuo's experience also shed light on such changes:

> In Australia, I did need to arrange my life and study plan at the beginning of each semester at the Australian university, which I did not need to do at my Chinese university. I thought this context had more challenges for me, but it also was perfect for my future.

According to these examples, it is evident that many students have realised changes from a member who was positioned in a collective context to an individual who needed to interact with different actants in a new context actively. According to Ai (2015), each nation has its particular cultural and social features, which affect people's identity and behaviours. Haohao and Shuoshuo's experiences indicated that the Australian academic context seemed to be an individualist (Hofstede, 1986), which potentially made them become independent in learning. In the process of adapting to the new context, people not only reshaped their identities but also constructed their own space to reflect their views towards the cross-cultural and societal changes they experienced (Ai, 2015).

Although these students had various changes of identity as intercultural learners, they also developed individual spaces to reflect on their interactions with the new context.

Students' experiences of communicating with peers at their Australian universities at times reflected their effective and multiple negotiations in the new learning space. As Ai (2015) indicated, "a person's space is produced in communication with others" (p. 356). In the process of communicating with others, individuals produce their space. In this study, some students felt that the communications with other peers helped them to engage in the Australian learning context. For instance, Dongdong mentioned his experiences in the following way.

> In my opinion, I thought most of my Australian students were very warm-hearted, and most of them want to help international students to adapt to the local environment. For example, when I started my university study, I could not entirely understand course content. I asked some questions to Australian peers. They were accommodating and explained my questions, gave me suggestions. I thought they really wished to help others no matter what the problems were. They tried their best to help each other in learning.

Baobao also comparatively discussed her views on the differences between her Chinese and Australian peers in learning.

> Many Australian students usually appreciated other students' design. For Chinese students, they are used to compare their works with others unrealistically. Sometimes, a student notices other's work is better than his/her, he/she may be jealous of other students. In this case, it is difficult to communicate with each other. They do not want to share their ideas or knowledge with other students. Many Australian students seemed to be friendly and open-minded to discuss problems. I think every skill to design something is just a method rather than a secret. When it is used in the different design, the effects or results may also be varied. Therefore, sharing ideas with others is so vital for a design major.

These data extracts indicated a positive relationship between the interviewees and their peers at their Australian universities. In their minds, such positive communication could create a space that made them feel confident in learning in the new context. Specifically, as Baobao's interview indicated, the comparative experiences demonstrated her changes of views as a student in different learning

spaces that were created by the different peer relationships. In contrast, some interviewees had different experiences. For instance, although they studied in the Australian context, they felt isolated and found it challenging to construct positive relationships with others. Yuner shared her experience:

> I felt it was difficult to make friends in Australia. For example, when I had some learning questions, I wanted to ask other peers. However, some of them did not want to help me. I also felt it was difficult to get in-depth communication with Australian peers … In Australia, I can feel everyone becomes more independent. I felt awkward to engage in a group in learning as every student can select different courses depending on the individual situation even though some 2+2 Chinese students were in the same major. I thought most Chinese students may still like to a collective mode.

Yuner's data extract indicated her feeling of isolation from the perspective of communication with peers in the new context. It seemed that she preferred to study in the Chinese collective space, rather than in the individual focused context in Australia. In her mind, a contradiction between the Chinese and Australian contexts was generated. In the process of adjustment to the new context, even though she has studied in Australia, she seemed to prefer the learning and lifestyles at her Chinese university. Such contradicted feelings made her became an individual who needed to adjust to an individualist context, but she still preferred the collective Chinese mode, which positioned her mind in between different contexts as an intercultural learner who kept reflecting, comparing and negotiating the cultural, social, and educational differences.

5.3.4.3 I am in-between in collective and individualistic contexts.

The above analysis of the different campus contexts and students' relationships with peers reminded me of my own transitional experiences that created an in-between space in my mind. Generally, I had a similar learning journey to that of the research participants. However, I felt it was complex when I came to consider how to conceptualise my own in-between space after experiencing two different contexts.

In China, I was a member of a 2+2 programme rather than an individual who had many independent learning and life experiences. In the Chinese stage, I felt that every student actually was in-between with each other in their programmes and universities. As Shuoshuo and Yuner's interview

data indicated, learning and living as a group was the default setting for most students who spontaneously had close connections with other group members. In this case, a semi-closed space was created smoothly, which perhaps ensured learners had a limited sense of independence in learning. After engaging in such a context for a long time, I felt that I was in a fixed group. Theoretically, I am an individual who is different from any other students. Practically, I belong to a group that may have many similarities. Consequently, my sense of in-between moved back and forth dynamically and circularly within the Chinese scope rather than engaging in the Australian context in depth.

After moving to the Australian university, I remembered that I was trying to find my group, especially in the initial stage. However, I realised that it was impossible to have the fixed group anymore because everyone had different situations in both study and life. For example, different students started their Australian learning stage at various times because of IELTS or other academic issues. The students who passed IELTS before coming to Australia were able to begin their discipline study without language training in Australia successfully. However, some students needed to learn English first, which delayed their discipline learning. Furthermore, students usually rent rooms outside the university campus in different locations. Such a situation also made it somewhat difficult to contact each other frequently. In learning, every student could select different courses in one semester even in the same major. Hence, it was difficult to study and live together as was the case in the Chinese stage.

In this context, I also become independent even though I was seeking the collective features in my daily life and study. This change made me step out of the previous collective space. I was not a group member who lived and studied in between with other peers. In contrast, I became an individual that needed to survive independently in a new context. I needed to communicate with new actants (e.g. people, society, and culture) to establish an individual-based network, which helped me to become a person who was influenced by both collective and individual sociocultural contexts. Specifically, on the one hand, for instance, I needed to get used to being an "individual" learner who usually studied at university alone without strong connections with other classmates as a fixed cohort. On the other hand, I still had certain connections with the "collective" context. For example, even though I moved to Australia, I still wanted to live as a Chinese diaspora who could have strong connections with other Chinese people and community in the new context, in this case, the local Chinese cohort in Australia.

Considering the relationship with other people in the individual context, I thought I was isolated to some extent, especially in the undergraduate stage. Although I did not have a large fixed group membership in my 2+2 programme, I usually studied with some Chinese friends in a small group. In contrast, I did not have any communications with local Australian students. It seemed that they were in the same group, but many Chinese students, including me, seemed to be another separate group on campus. Such experiences were also found by Hou (2011). She suggested that there were two fuzzy but apparent groups that were labelled as "we" and "they" when Chinese students studied in the foreign context. In line with this finding, I noticed that I actually had the same sense of "we" as Chinese in the Australian university, but "they" as local students also had their own space.

However, as an intercultural learner, I had no choice to avoid the trend that they and we are mixed in a context that emphasises the individual. In this context, I felt that my mind was always in-between the different contexts. I did become independent in learning, but I struggled with the negotiations between these two contexts. I asked myself who you are? Where do I belong? To answer these questions, I would say that I am a person who had fluid identities and senses of belonging, but I may not belong to either the Chinese or Australian contexts. Thus, I am an in-between person who lives in an in-between space that is shaped by my own hybrid understandings of communications within different contexts. Based on my own experiences, I thought that the 2+2 programmes not only allowed me to experience two different sociocultural and educational systems but also shaped an in-between space that facilitated students to become in-between persons.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated the spectrum of a 2+2 in-between learning space based on students' comparative experiences towards the uses of ICTs, different assessment modes, different teaching strategies, and diverse university contexts and cultures between the Chinese and Australian stages of their programmes. These different elements in and across systems created an intercultural learning network that motivated students to construct their 2+2 in-between learning space. According to the analysis, it is obvious that the 2+2 programme provided a complex pathway for students to experience these educational differences and this allowed them to shape their sense of in-between as intercultural learners. The two layers of in-between space created by the 2+2 setting influenced students' changing senses of identity, agency and belonging towards different educational and cultural contexts.

Through comparing the Chinese and Australian experiences, most students indicated a sense of in-between in their minds. Their learning experiences suggested that their learning usually happened in physical places without enough engagements with virtual space in the Chinese stage. When they moved to Australia, learning seemed to happen in an in-between space that was shaped by the connections between different educational contexts via multiple changes in teaching strategies, ICT usages, assessment modes, and university academic cultures. Through continually shifting individual preferences and learning strategies in the new context, many students developed their own sense of in-betweenness as intercultural learners in the transitional learning process.

To further interpret the underlying meanings of these research findings, in the next chapter I will discuss the meanings of in-between by comparing and interacting with existing literature. More importantly, the research questions that frame the study will be addressed critically by analysing the research finding set against relevant extant literature. Furthermore, the research contribution and implications of the study will be discussed, as will consideration be given to the limitations and shortcomings of this research study. Then, possible future research directions will be provided, and a final remark proffered concerning the significant points of this research study. This chapter will conclude the thesis.

Chapter 6:

Critical reflections on the 'findings' and concluding remark

6.1 Introduction

This study investigated a group of Chinese students' learning experiences in China-Australia 2+2. This is an under-researched area in the field of TNHE and CFCRS. My study has added a student perspective to this research field, allowing the student voices to be expressed in research interviews. To achieve this aim, I interviewed a number of students about their learning trajectories in 2+2 programmes. Furthermore, I aimed to understand how the 2+2 setting (re)shaped students' learning trajectories and how these students made sense of their intercultural learning journeys as 2+2 learners.

As the conclusion to this research, this chapter is structured in the following way. First, the research questions that framed the study and which were documented in the introductory chapter are briefly reviewed to recall the major focus of this study. Based on the research findings outlined in some detail in Chapters 4 and 5, answers to address each research question are provided. Second, the significant research contributions to the existing knowledge in the research field are discussed by a reflection on the research findings set against the existing literature. Then, the shortcomings of the research and future study directions are reported respectively. Finally, a concluding remark is provided to summarise the study and its significant findings and contribution to knowledge.

6.2 Answers to the Research Questions

The overarching research question was: how do Chinese students experience learning in China-Australia 2+2 programmes? To address this question, I proposed two sub-questions: (1) How do Chinese students make sense of themselves as 2+2 learners, that is, make sense of their agency, identity, and belonging? (2) What factors may have impacted on the students' intercultural learning experiences?

To answer these sub-questions, I conducted a semi-structured interview based qualitative study to explore Chinese students' learning experiences in China-Australia 2+2 programmes. Twelve

Chinese students who were studying in several 2+2 programmes participated in this study to share their learning experiences. The collected qualitative data was analysed through both inductive thematic analysis and deductive explorations informed by the research literature and by the reflexivity of my own 2+2 experiences and a theoretical model of intercultural adjustment (e.g. Gill's transformation learning framework).

To theoretically analyse and understand students' interactions with different educational systems, I adopted Homi Bhabha's concept of third space to conceptualise an in-between space in 2+2 programmes. As a major finding, this study concluded that in learning via the 2+2 setting, many students indicated a strong sense of in-betweenness of Chinese and Australian education. Students' dynamic learning stories suggest that the 2+2 setting, as one mode of CFCRS programme, is a way to create in-betweenness through CFCRS articulation programmes. More specifically, students' sense of in-betweenness in this study was mainly reflected by their changes of identity, agency, and belonging.

In this section, I try to unpack the essence of in-betweenness based on research participants' 2+2 learning journeys and my own story, which aims to interpret the meaning of in-betweenness in CFCRS 2+2 programmes.

6.2.1 How do Chinese students experience learning in China-Australia 2+2 programmes?

This is an overarching research question that guided my investigation of students' changes in their 2+2 learning journeys. Generally, this study found that these Chinese students reflected different learning trajectories in their 2+2 programmes. Specifically, they dynamically experienced 2+2 learning processes, while constantly negotiating different academic systems to position themselves in reasonable roles with a sense of in-betweenness. Students' multiple learning experiences generally supported the argument that the complicated processes of international students' intercultural adjustment cannot be holistically theorised by existing models (Burnett & Gardner, 2006). Rather, in this study, students' learning processes are in between two different systems under 2+2 programmes. The sense of dynamic in-between can be identified through the following perspectives based on students' experiences as reflected in the research data.

6.2.1.1 In-between changes in the 2+2 setting

First, from a national level, these participants are in between different social, cultural, and educational contexts of China and Australia. Existing research has suggested that China and Australia have various differences regarding cultural, educational, and social settings (Hofstede, 1986; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). When two different systems that have different rules, traditions, and standards work together, cross-system tensions are likely to be spontaneously generated (Bhabha, 1994; Engeström, 1999). People who work in such mixed contexts do need to realise and make sense of various cross-system differences in order to deal with the various tensions (Engeström, 1999). Then, an in-between space created by students' various views and senses towards cross-system tensions becomes a platform for them to position themselves as in-betweeners (Bhabha, 1994). Students' experiences in 2+2 programmes reflect how they negotiated with cross-system tensions. Their multiple approaches to deal with cross-system differences indicated various shifts between the two cultural, social, and educational contexts.

Second, from an institutional level, these participants are in between different educational approaches and academic cultures in their 2+2 programmes, which could be considered as situational differences. Influenced by the general cultural differences between China and Australia, Chinese and Australian universities also have particular and idiosyncratic features. As students mentioned in this study, teaching strategies, Internet-based tools (e.g. Blackboard), assessments, university academic cultures revealed dramatic differences in their 2+2 programmes across the two learning contexts. Although students were studying in a 2+2 articulated mode, they still needed to overcome cross-system barriers and to reshape their approaches to survive in the two different systems. In this case, many situational differences (different usages of ICTs, different assessment practices, contrasting teaching approaches, and different university cultures) created a learning space that ensured students constantly shifted between two systems, constituting them as in-betweeners through the 2+2 setting. It is also important to note that educational institutions may also need to "adjust to" students who engage in the process of intercultural learning and adjustment, especially in such articulation programmes. Although students may indicate different senses of identity, agency, and belonging when they study in multiple systems and institutions, educators, and policymakers also need to carefully consider the diversity of students when designing such articulation programmes.

Third, at an individual level, these 2 + 2 programmes participants are in between different roles as part of a diaspora. When facing situational differences in the 2+2 setting, students reflected a different sense of agency, identity, and belonging, which revealed how they made sense of themselves as 2+2 students in cross-system learning settings. Considering the changes of agency, many students (e.g. Baobao, Lamei, Dongdong, Shuoshuo, Haohao, and Gaogao) indicated positive experiences towards the cross-system learning differences and intercultural adjustment. They seemed to build up confidences to adjust to the intercultural learning as in-betweeners who knew how to handle educational differences emerged from the 2+2 transition process. Notably, as Baobao's story suggested, she not only critically understood differences in learning between China and Australia but also fostered her capabilities to deal with problems in her cross-system study. In contrast, some students indicated a disempowered sense of agency towards the educational differences, for example, Jiufu, who experienced a painful transition process, even though he considered himself as an outstanding student in the Chinese stage.

Concerning the sense of identity, most students' experiences suggested a sense of in-betweenness that has been developed through the 2+2 learning. On the one hand, many participants (e.g. Gaogao, Dongdong, Haohao, Baobao, and Shuoshuo) seemed to have a sense of in-betweenness, and they can take advantages of cross-system differences, even though they experienced stress in their transition, especially in the initial stage. On the other hand, some students seemed to be not able to actively experience the process of becoming in-betweeners who can accept and handle the educational differences with progressive attitudes, and then developed positive attitudes towards their changes as intercultural learners in a cross-system context.

Finally, influenced by the different senses of agency and identity, as the research findings suggested, students also indicated different senses of belonging. For instance, some students (e.g. Baobao, Lamei, Haohao, and Shuoshuo) were able to adjust to the Australian learning context. Then, they developed their belonging towards the new educational system, even though they studied in their 2+2 programmes that had many cross-system academic inconsistencies (e.g. teaching approaches, assessment modes, the usages of technology, and general university culture). Based on the positive sense of belonging, they may be able to engage in learning activities in the Australian context deeply. In contrast, students (e.g. Yuner, Jiufu, and Qihao) showed a dramatically different sense of belonging towards the new context and even their 2+2 programmes. For instance, even though Yuner were

studying in her Australian stage, she indicated strong preferences to the Chinese educational system and learning approaches, which potentially reflected that she might not develop a sense of belonging to the new learning context. According to students' dynamic learning experiences summarised above, it is apparent that their approaches and attitudes towards the cross-system learning are multiple, varied and complex. This is because many students became ambivalent after experiencing the different cultural, social, and educational differences, which provoked them to have a sense of in-betweenness in the cross-system setting. As a consequence, a reciprocal relationship of in-betweenness between students and the 2+2 setting emerged from multiple and dynamic learning stories.

6.2.1.2 In-between reflexive narrative

Participants' learning experiences and their multiple changes in the 2+2 learning processes made me realise that I am also an in-betweener who has fluid roles with different approaches to deal with the cross-system differences as a former 2+2 student and a current PhD candidate at an Australian university. As an outsider, I noticed that many students in 2+2 programmes experienced both Chinese and Australian educational features with endless negotiations within the two different systems. The 2+2 setting actually established an in-between space to foster students to become persons with fluid identities, oscillating agency, and multiple senses of belonging.

This finding suggests that such articulation education may not just have a series of evident and well-documented goals and influences, such as increasing the level of internationalisation of Chinese HE, offering Chinese students multiple pathways to study in tertiary level, and positioning students as "profit machines" for both Chinese and foreigner universities. All these aims or intentions are understandable because different stakeholders have their thoughts to design and run such articulation education business. However, for students, as educational customers, although they also engage in the process of achieving some of the above aims, they may not be able to realise the changes that they may face in such articulation education. One of these changes is to have the possibility of establishing the sense of in-betweenness after experiencing their articulation programmes with complex and dynamic attitudes. Hence, the construction of the sense of in-betweenness could be either a planned or unintended consequence for students.

For each individual student, they may have different motivations to study in articulation programmes. If students initially have intentions to experience the cross-system educational setting

actively, they may indicate positive attitudes when they spontaneously engage in the intercultural learning process. In contrast, if students initially do not have a firm intention to this learning transition, they may engage in the process of being in-between without enough positive experiences. For universities, policymakers, and educators, they may be able to claim that such educational settings could theoretically offer students multiple educational experiences. However, they may not explicitly identify the underlying complexity of studying in such modes from students' perspectives, which is the process of becoming in-betweeners who may immerse in a status of constant negotiations with different education contexts in an in-between learning space.

Hence, this study may suggest that the development of a sense of in-betweenness for students could be either an unintended or planned result of developing such articulation education depending on different students' intentions to select articulation programmes as the learning pathway. Each student may either positively engage in the establishment of in-betweenness or reflect some negative responses towards this process. The 2+2 articulation programme objectively set up a learning context that positions students in between different education systems. Practically, students usually indicate different reactions towards the in-between learning space, which leads to various attitudes and experiences of having the sense of in-betweenness. In short, although different stakeholders have various aims of running articulation education and programmes, for students, the development of the sense of in-betweenness could be one of the essential experiences in the learning process, and they may indicate different attitudes towards this unobservable result.

As the results showed, some students were able to positively engage in the processes of shaping a sense of in-betweenness, but some of them subjectively rejected such a phenomenon, as they seemed to be too used to their previous Chinese traditions of learning. From an insider perspective, I realised that my own learning trajectory reflected a strong sense of in-betweenness. Based on careful reflection as outlined in previous chapters, my learning experiences indicated complex processes of being an in-betweener, who negotiated continuously and renegotiated within different educational contexts, majors, tasks, and barriers in an in-between learning space.

The approach of reflexive analysis allowed me to recall and examine my individual experiences of in-between status not only in the 2+2 programme but also across my whole higher educational trajectory and even in my current PhD research study. The role of in-betweener in

qualitative research studies is fluid and dynamic, rather than fixed, single, and static (Milligan, 2016). My learning experiences actually illustrated a specific and interesting picture of my process of having a sense of in-betweenness from multiple perspectives, such as a 2+2 student, a PhD researcher, and a member of the Chinese diaspora. To answer the sub-research questions, I will recap the key findings from my data analysis of students' 2+2 learning experiences and also relate the findings to existing literature and reflections on my individual experiences.

6.2.2 How do Chinese students make sense of themselves as 2+2 learners, that is, make sense of their agency, identity, and belonging?

Students' dynamic learning experiences indicated a status of negotiation in between different educational contexts in CFCRS 2+2 programmes. The negotiations were found in relation to agency, identity, and belonging. The research participants experienced CFCRS programmes as 2+2 students in between different goals, approaches, and systems.

6.2.2.1 In-betweenness of agency: Constant and dynamic oscillations.

Considering the sense of agency, these students are in between being empowered and disempowered towards the different academic issues they experienced in the 2+2 learning processes. They reflected multiple negotiated experiences towards the transition across educational contexts.

In the Chinese stage, for most participants, they seemed to be empowered towards discipline course exams but felt emasculated about passing the IELTS. Most students paid more significant attention to IELTS as it determined their Australian study. Their learning experiences of IELTS in the Chinese stage indicated a struggling sense of agency, which potentially indicated that learning IELTS seemed to be the priority in the Chinese stage. In contrast, students' views and approaches towards discipline learning indicated their empowered sense of agency. It seems that many students were confident about passing related academic tasks of discipline subjects as they believed that exams were easily passed. These shifts between IELTS focus and discipline course learning suggested that many students are in between different learning goals and approaches.

Such findings echo several previous studies, which found that many Chinese students were struggling with IELTS in their articulation programmes (e.g. Q. Feng, 2016; Gao et al., 2012; Yu, 2014). According to Gao et al. (2012), most joint programmes set up a benchmark of English tests (e.g. IELTS) for students who wish to conduct their foreign study stage. However, the language

requirement could become a significant barrier for many students that may not have a strong English learning background. As Yu (2014) and Q. Feng (2016) respectively found, English and IELTS were considered as the main barriers for many Chinese students when they were at their respective Chinese universities. However, these studies did not investigate the relationship of learning the English/IELTS and discipline knowledge. To fill this knowledge gap, I has indicated that there is an imbalance between learning English/IELTS and discipline knowledge for many students in their first two years of study at Chinese universities.

From the perspective of in-betweenness, I realised that this imbalanced focus might indicate an issue of learning quality in some 2+2 programmes. Such an imbalanced situation in my study happened as well. When I started my 2+2 programme, I had no idea about the IELTS. My programmes arranged extra IELTS courses for 2+2 students to help us learn how to pass it. However, I felt so emasculated to learn it, as language learning seemed to be much more difficult than discipline knowledge. Under such a situation, I wished to get rid of the extra stress from the IELTS. In doing so, most of my energies were utilised to pass IELTS. Practically, many students, including me, went to IELTS training schools outside the university in the second year in order to boost their IELTS scores. Hence, we lost the opportunities to learn discipline courses for quite a long time. When the final exam was coming, we came back to study and could hardly remember textbooks and other resources in order to pass the tests.

Another critical issue that may make this IELTS barrier severe is students' individual English proficiency. For example, I was not good at English when I was in high school. Therefore, I did not have the strong fundamental knowledge to pass IELTS easily. In this case, I had to pay more attention to IELTS as I knew it significantly influenced the opportunity for my Australian visa, my university offer, and my time. Consequently, although I passed IELTS, I felt that the time was mainly spent dealing with IELTS. However, when I reflected on these experiences, I noticed that even though students might be able to pass IELTS, they actually lost the primary direction they should have focused on, which is the discipline knowledge. Practically, it seemed that learning the discipline knowledge actually started after the research participants moved to Australia.

This finding reflects a similar concern as claimed by Zhuang and Tang (2012) in their study. They were worried that the language requirement and English barriers could negatively influence the

quality of managing, teaching and learning practices when Chinese universities cooperatively run such programmes with foreign partners. As they suggested, many students may not have a high enough level of English proficiency to fulfil the language requirement when they started such programmes. Hence, they did need to pay more attention to achieve language scores to start their foreign learning stages, but this was to the detriment of their engagement with discipline knowledge.

With regard to students' sense of agency in the Australian context, the story becomes much more complicated. On the one hand, several research findings partly affirm the current transition adjustment theoretical model: stress-adaptation-growth (e.g. Gill, 2007; Y. Kim, 1988). In the initial stage in my study, most students wished to survive in the new system first, as they were not familiar with the new context and did not have proper skills to deal with Australian learning and teaching approaches. Their experiences were generally consistent with existing research findings that when Chinese students moved to a new context, they usually faced initial stress (Gu et al., 2010; J. Zhu, 2016).

By continually negotiating with the new context, many students actively found their own approaches to adjust to the Australian learning context positively. Their negotiations are the processes of adjustment to the new context (Gill, 2007). These students' experiences revealed that although they were in between struggling with the influence of previous experiences in the new context, they could actively deal with issues that they faced. Finally, they positively transferred from the initial struggle from in-between experiences to adjustment to the new context. These findings offer further shreds of evidence to previous studies, which identified that many Chinese students could adapt to the Western educational system and mode after staying in the new contexts for a period (Briguglio & Smith, 2012; Gu, 2016a; Quan et al., 2016; Wong, 2012).

However, as this study found, not all students were able to achieve the positive development through experiencing stress. For instance, Jiufu's stories indicated that he felt disappointed and disempowered to deal with the issues in learning at the Australian university. He started language learning with a struggling and conflicted mind. Such negative experiences highly influenced his performances and experiences in the formal discipline learning. As his research interview suggested, he felt it difficult to deeply engage in the Australian learning modes, which meant he was always stressed. As a result, although he insisted on studying in Australia, he actually became passive in

respect of surviving in the new context. This is worrying, given he was an outstanding student in China. Such gaps seemed to destroy his positive attitudes towards intercultural learning and adjustment. In this case, he did not want to adjust but wished to escape from this context. It seems that he always faced stress and negotiated with different issues negatively. Although he may have achieved specific development, such growth seemed to be micro to some extent. His experiences challenged the theoretical assumptions that people are always able to deal with cross-cultural issues actively and finally adapt to the new context (Gill, 2007; Y. Kim, 1988).

My own experiences partly resonate with these students who achieved positive transformations in their 2+2 programmes. When I came to Australia, although I did not need to learn IELTS first, I felt that I was not able to engage deeply in learning in the Australian classroom. For instance, when my lecturer asked students to design a poster creatively but did not teach us how to do it, I felt disempowered and struggled, as I was used to following lecturers to create something step by step. I did not even know how to use Photoshop professionally. To deal with such learning issues, I asked my peers in China to help to create posters, or I used "*Mei Tu Xiu Xiu*" *(美图秀秀)*, which is an image editing software for recreational purposes, rather than a professional design tool, to complete my assignment. Such experiences indicate that although I felt disempowered in doing assignments when I was in the initial stage in Australia, I could come up with my solutions to help me overcome problems. As I mentioned above, as a member of the Chinese diaspora who lives in a technological era, I could seek help from my home country and make use of special Chinese tools to deal with learning issues in the English language context in Australia. Although it seemed to be unprofessional, this experience enabled me to genuinely engage and survive in my initial stage at the Australian university.

In contrast, some of the research participants became immersed in the sense of disempowerment towards cross-system learning and adjustment for a long time, even for some across their whole period of studying overseas. It is evident that not all students had the same learning experiences. Some students (e.g. Jiufu, Yuner, Qihao, and Dengdeng) felt it was difficult to deal with the cross-system differences to some extent. Due to various reasons (e.g. language barriers, uncomfortable language school experiences, and different teaching strategies), these students had various negative attitudes towards the new learning systems. These factors were also found in many cognate extant studies (e.g. Ai, 2017; Heng, 2018; Zhou & Todman, 2009). Specifically, one of the

apparent features that emerged from students' experiences in this study is that they were deeply immersed in their previous Chinese learning experiences. It seems that they preferred the Chinese educational mode and internally rejected adjusting themselves to the new context with fresh views as intercultural learners. This negative sense towards intercultural differences also made them feel greater stress.

Facing the various issues in the Australian context, they critically compared the teaching and learning differences between the Chinese and the Australian contexts from their own experiences. For instance, Yuner identified that the teaching strategies in the Australian stage were not supportive of her study, as lecturers seemed to not teach enough knowledge in a didactical approach. In this process, she passively studied in the new system, rather than actively adapted to it, which appears to challenge the existing adjustment model, as she was strongly conditioned to the Chinese strategies, even though she adjusted to the Australian context reluctantly. It seemed that such students stayed in the state of adaptation for a long time. For them, it became difficult to actively develop, as found by previous studies (Gill, 2007; Gu, 2009). As a result, these students showed a strong disempowered sense of agency towards their intercultural learning and adjustment. Such experiences revealed that these students oscillated in between active and passive engagements in dealing with cross-system barriers. Compared with these students' experiences, although I generally felt positive in dealing with learning issues in my cross-system study, I actually experienced a problematic journey across my study until the current PhD research.

Generally, I was in-between the sense of empowered and disempowered agency towards a series of issues in my PhD study. Specifically, as I changed my area from design to education, I felt that I started an unpredictable adventure during my PhD journey. For instance, I became immersed in shifting research directions. When I started my PhD, my primary research interests were about blended learning. After one and half years studying in this field, I noticed that I was not able to find in-depth and original research points, even though I had passed the first year milestone. Then, I moved to investigate ICTs in education for another year. However, when I participated in the second internal milestone, I was asked to change the research topic again, which was about intercultural learning and adjustment. Although I insisted on overcoming different problems when I faced new difficulties, such experiences made me feel frustrated and disappointed, even though I realised my study was nonetheless promising. In line with Park's (2018) argument of a sense of agency, such changes of

research focus made me immersed in between "mentally difficult to do" but "physically have to change".

Based on the discussion of a sense of agency, it is clear that students' sense of agency to deal with different academic tasks, educational contexts, and cultural differences oscillated and was dynamic and changing. The shape of different senses of agency is significantly influenced by the interactions between the students and their educational context (Bandura, 2006). Their constant negotiations with new contexts indicated that the process of adjustment is not linear but dynamic and complicated with constant shifts between current contexts (Gill, 2007; Gu et al., 2010). The academic setting of 2+2 programmes demanded students constantly negotiate with different issues in respect of their learning. Students reflected multiple senses of agency towards such cross-system differences. Our experiences demonstrated a vivid picture of the shifting agency between acting positively and being frustrated. These various and constant negotiations in different contexts resulted in students experiencing dynamic changes in their senses of identity in 2+2 programmes.

6.2.2.2 In-betweenness of identity: Fluid roles.

My research demonstrated that students' sense of identity is fluid during 2+2 programmes. This situation reflects how research participants think of themselves as students who hold different senses of agency across the period of their 2+2 programmes. According to Hogg, Terry, and White (1995), identity is a mediation that connects society and individual behaviours. Therefore, individuals' behaviours reflect the relationship between their identity and the society that they stay in (Hogg et al., 1995). Although many Chinese students' experiences reflected similar features that are summarised by previous studies, I further noticed that identity is fluid and far more complex than conventional views of Chinese students. Based on the research findings concerning the students' senses of identity outlined in Chapter 4, the various changes of identity that students indicated in their 2+2 learning process suggested that students embraced fluid identities and learned with others in ways that had uncertain and unpredictable outcomes, as they were in a continual process of becoming. Importantly, their identities are "thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (Hall & Du Gay, 1996, p. 6).

When discussing the sense of identity in the Chinese context, most students identified themselves as dependent and demotivated followers. Such identity indicates various features of

Chinese culture, especially in learning, which has been widely discussed by many researchers (Allen, 1995; J. Li, 2003a, 2003b; Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Volet, 1999). For example, Allen (1995) suggested that the sense of hierarchy in traditional Chinese culture was significant. Profoundly respecting parents or teachers was considered as an important feature in the Chinese context, which is also known as "a sign of obedience" (J. Li, 2003a, p. 147). In this study, for instance, many students selected the 2+2 programme and their majors relying on parental suggestions.

Furthermore, in learning, lecturers were usually seen as the authority, so following them without many arguments was considered as a way to study from the perspective of traditional Chinese culture (Biggs, 1996c; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). As many participants indicated, they were used to listening to lecturers' teaching without much active engagement in their daily study, a feature which has been widely identified by existing studies (Chan, 1999). According to the students' behaviours discussed above, it is apparent that they were spontaneously used to being followers in many situations of their life and study, as the social and cultural contexts encouraged them to be a person that is suitable for their specific society.

The feature of students' identity in the Chinese stage is understandable. I had similar experiences with those of most participants. Most Chinese students were studying in a highly stressful context when they were in high school because of the pressure of university entry exams. The major learning approach was following lecturers to prepare for the exam via constantly practising mock tests. This kind of learning mode could be deeply inserted into students' minds. Such an experience possibly ensured that students have a potential consciousness that learning is to follow lecturers, to practise tests repeatedly, and to pass exams after being immersed in this kind of context for a long time. This mode potentially fostered students to become followers in many cases. After starting university, I felt that the high school learning experience had deeply grown in my mind. I was used to following lecturers' teaching and waiting for their "knowledge feeding", even though the university context is much more flexible than high school. The sense of identity as a follower or demotivator continued to influence me. However, when I reviewed the participants' experiences in Australia, I noted that their stories were different and more complicated.

When students moved to Australia, their identities underwent dramatic changes. As the results suggested, most students became independent and motivated explorers, which is generally similar

with findings concluded by Wong (2012) and Gu (2016a), who respectively found that many Chinese students became independent in both learning and daily life after studying in different contexts for a period, for example, in Australia or the UK. However, students' changes in the current study offer more complicated insights and add further evidence to the current literature of understanding and theorising Chinese students' changes of identity as intercultural learners.

On the one hand, many students actively enjoyed the change of identity from follower to explorer due to the educational changes (e.g. teaching strategies, assessments, and campus setting) in the Australian context, which could be a "learning shock" (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006). For example, many lecturers usually motivated students to explore knowledge individually without much detailed supervision; assessments were multiple and flexible; the university campus is open, and classes usually did not have a precisely fixed cohort. These positive experiences were consistent with the findings of many existing research studies that identified that Chinese students were able to engage in the culturally western educational model actively (T. Wang & Shan, 2007; Wu, 2015; J. Zhu, 2016). Meanwhile, students' positive changes as explorers also challenges conventional understandings of Chinese learners, who are usually represented as passive in learning (Samuelowicz, 1987). However, some students' stories provided evidence that could further refine these findings.

On the other hand, contrarily, some of them (e.g. Yuner, Jiufu, Qihao, and Dengdeng) seemed to have passive attitudes towards accepting the reality that they had to become independent explorers in the new learning context. According to the research findings, they actually have been profoundly influenced by the Chinese context and indicated strong preferences for the Chinese mode. For instance, Dengdeng argued that being independent in learning as an Internet-assisted student seemed to be worthless; why pay expensive tuition fees to be trained in Australia where lecturers seemed to not teach much knowledge in detail. It seemed that she would have preferred to study as a follower in Australia and she did not want to be highly independent in her learning. For some of these students, a dilemma in the sense of identity emerged from these experiences.

Many students positioned themselves as passively in-between learners, who physically studied in Australia with seeming independence, but who remained psychologically immersed in China with deeply dependent minds. This suggests that students' previous learning experiences had significant influences on their study in a new environment or mode (Biggs, 1996c; C. Zhu, Valcke,

& Schellens, 2009). Such influences could be either positive or negative. For instance, several students' experiences (e.g. Yuner and Qihao) suggested that they seemed to be still followers in the Australian context, even though they did need to explore and learn knowledge by themselves actively. As these students mentioned, they also followed the lecturers' teaching as a significant learning strategy. Such experiences did not make this feel much different from their Chinese experiences. Thus, they seemed to be shifting their identities in a fluid manner in between follower and explorer with contradicted minds and complex attitudes towards these educational differences. These fluid identities reflected the fact that many students were able to flexibly change their roles and fit into the new context, which suggests that their identities were not fixed but dynamic (Hall, 1992).

It is worthwhile to note that compared with these experiences, different students in different disciplines had a different sense of identity across the two educational contexts. As Dengdeng who studied in Design indicated, she was used to being a follower when she was studying in China. However, the Australian mode pushed her to become an independent explorer who had certain negative attitudes towards the new teaching and learning model. In contrast, Yuner and Qihao's experiences indicated that they did not experience many differences in terms of in-class learning mode between China and Australia, which is always lecturer-guided in the Business-related major. As a consequence, they seemed always to be followers in their study, but with some differences.

As Yuner's experience suggested, she deeply engaged in the role of the follower in the Chinese context with some positive attitudes, as she believed that she would be able to achieve her goals by adopting so-called memorisation or rote learning. In contrast, when she mentioned her Australian experiences, it seemed that she was not used to the Australian mode of a follower who still needed to be an independent learner. Their experiences suggested that the shape of identity is affected across the boundaries of nations, cultures, and societies (Jenkins, 2008). Moreover, these students' learning approaches were also involved and flexible across different contexts, rather than fixed as rote learners who preferred memorisations, which revealed that different students were able to make changes to their learning in different educational and cultural contexts (Kember, 2016b).

Students' changes of identity as 2+2 learners in the transition from China to Australia indicated how they continually (re)shaped their roles in learning. My experience was also dynamic, and my role continued to shift between multiple situations. As a former 2+2 student, I experienced

similar changes of identity to most of my participants and became much more independent than before. However, I am not only a 2+2 student who is an in-between follower and explorer, but also a PhD researcher who is in-between different research topics, and cultural contractions, which potentially fostered my strong sense of agency and capacity to deal with different issues. In this situation, I became an in-betweener with fluid identities.

Being a PhD student is entirely different from my previous roles. Although when I was in my 2+2 programme and master's study, I did need to become a knowledge explorer. However, I was still following specific teaching and learning rules with little autonomy in my study compared to my PhD experiences. Before doing the PhD, I wanted to have classes and lecturers to teach me something. However, now in the PhD, the situation is different. PhD students do not have any formal classes during the whole four years of study. In this case, most students rely on themselves to study, even though everyone has supervisors.

My sense of in-betweenness was not only in my study but also in my daily life across China and Australia. Interestingly, I seemed to experience various frustrations when I went back to China. For instance, when I was appointed as visiting PhD student to study in CUHK for three months, I was not sure who I should be in Hong Kong. Although Hong Kong has been returned to China for some time now, it seemed that I felt confused as to whether I was a Chinese or a foreigner there. For example, in daily communication no matter whether at university or other places, everyone spoke Cantonese to me. However, I could not understand it and felt that I was not a local person who able to communicate with Chinese people in Hong Kong without any language barriers. When they spoke Cantonese to me, I used Mandarin to talk to them. In most cases, they struggled as they are not good at Mandarin. In this situation, we started to speak our own language and guessed others' meanings. If people still could not understand what I said, finally, I started to speak English. However, the Hong Kong style English seemed to be difficult to understand in some cases; my Chinese-Australian English also made them frustrated. During my visit, I was finally able to understand some Cantonese, which helped me to feel slightly less uncomfortable there. Although this example is about communication and language, I felt that my identity in Hong Kong, as a Chinese student who has a western educational background, was totally mixed. In some cases, I am a foreigner for local people who have similar skin to me. In some cases, I am a Chinese resident in a unique part of China; for

example, I could understand every road sign that used simplified Chinese. In some cases, I felt I am a Chinese-Australian as various rules (e.g. driving) there are similar to those in Australia.

The above examples indicated that the in-between sense of identity in intercultural learning and adjustment not only happened when a person moves to a context that is dramatically different from that in their own country, but also in a context that shared various similarities with the home country. Importantly, the sense of identity is profoundly influenced by the context the person lives in. These multiple experiences about changing made me deeply immersed in the status of in-between. According to Rizvi (2011), mobility potentially (re)constructs social identities. Being in between such mixed and complicated situations, I definitely realised that my learning journey from the 2+2 programme to PhD study is a process that let me to endlessly engage in an in-between space, where I needed to deal with various issues that emerged from the original cross-system learning start, which is the 2+2 programme. In this process of being in between, I live and study in a circle of uncertainty-negotiation-change, which seems to be much more complicated than the model of stress-adaptation-development.

6.2.2.3 In-betweenness of belonging: Positioning between different learning spaces.

The sense of belonging reflects how these students considered their own fit with different contexts through experiencing 2+2 programmes. According to Tinto, a sense of belonging reflects students' "subjective sense of affiliation and identification with the university community" (as cited in Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002, p. 228). It indicates "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment" (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992, p. 173). As the research findings indicated, some students revealed a strong sense of belonging to the Australian learning context. They were able to positively engage in the cross-system learning in 2+2 programmes, even though they faced various issues.

However, some participants indicated a strong sense of isolation in the new context, as they experienced some disappointing learning experiences that negatively influenced their sense of belonging as intercultural learners in the Australian context. Even though they were studying in Australia in order to complete their 2+2 programmes and to obtain degrees, they had a strong sense of belonging to the previous Chinese educational context and even the Chinese society, as they felt

very much disempowered to achieve successful intercultural adjustment in Australia. These experiences potentially offered some insights into the diasporic experience. Students (e.g. Jiufu and Yuner) believed that they belonged to their "homeland" no matter how long they stayed in the new context (Rizvi et al., 2016). Although Jiufu and Yuner's stories indicated their strong sense of non-belonging and non-adaptation to the Australian context, their experiences showed a special case of diaspora's "emotional connections" with their home country. The struggling "diasporic experiences" made them have a strong sense of belonging to their homeland.

This sense of belonging indicated that many students were in between the boundaries of two different contexts (Bhabha, 1994; Feng, 2009). Standing on the boundary, they seemed to "dance" in between the two different systems. Some students actively played in between different contexts, but some could not perform well interchangeably. This research has demonstrated how learning in 2+2 programmes opens the door to have a sense of in-betweenness. The ways to approach the cross-system differences indicate how students position themselves as in-betweeners, who spontaneously belong to an in-between learning space, the third space in Bhabha's terms.

Considering my own story, a sense of belonging underwent several rounds of change during my 2+2 learning process and indeed right through until now. When I was in China, I did not realise that the sense of belonging was an issue, as I grew up in China without experiences of living outside the country. Therefore, I believed that I belonged there. After coming to Australia, although I physically lived and studied in a new context, I still had a strong sense of belonging to China. Meanwhile, facing various differences and issues in my learning process in my undergraduate study made me feel that learning and living in China were more comfortable than in Australia. Therefore, I believed that I did not want to stay in Australia anymore after obtaining my degree. To escape from the sense of non-belonging in Australia, I booked flight tickets in the middle of each semester. Once I submitted all assignments, I went back to China. At that stage, it seemed that I was temporarily working in Australia for three months and then back to China for a holiday. I knew I was just an overseas student who would return to China after completing my study. Such feelings existed in my mind until I had completed my honours study.

Before conducting my PhD study in Australia, I wished to apply for a position in other countries. However, the Australian university offered a position for me soon after getting my

application. Considering my familiarity with the local context, I decided to stay in Australia. Through learning in the PhD, I started to genuinely engage in my research and the local life, as I knew the PhD would be a long process to completion and I needed to change to accept the new context and lifestyle. To be allowed to stay in Australia for future work, I applied for Australian PR during my PhD. During the waiting period for the decision, I realised that I might become a person who could officially and permanently work and live in two countries. When I obtained the visa, I felt that I am not just a 2+2 or PhD student, but I am a Chinese immigrant who is in between China and Australia.

The sense of belonging dynamically changed across different stages of the 2+2 programme for most students. Factors that influenced a sense of belonging were also multiple, including both internal and external elements. Although this study did not holistically investigate these factors in depth, from a learning perspective, students' reactions towards the cross-system educational differences provided some evidence to reveal their changes of belonging. My experience was extended by studying in the PhD stage, which potentially offered an opportunity for me to have further changes in my sense of belonging. After studying in Australia for nearly ten years, if I say I do not belong here, how could possibly I stay here for such a long period of time? If I say I belong here in Australia, I still feel that I do not really belong here, as I still have strong psychological connections with my own country where I grew up. Through learning in 2+2 programmes, my culture and ideology are mixed by Chinese and Australian cultures and contexts, which makes me believe that I am now in between these two countries, where I can stay in both with a strong sense of belonging, which means that I am living in-between (Ai, 2015).

6.2.3 What factors may have impacted on the students' intercultural learning experiences?

Students' dynamic changes of agency, identity, and belonging and the 2+2 programme setting have interactive relationships with each other. On the one hand, students' learning experiences reflected how they constantly negotiated with different contexts, which is a manifestation of in-between. On the other hand, various academic elements in their 2+2 programmes played important roles in (re)shaping students' agency, identity, and belonging in each system.

Based on the results reported in Chapter 4, I illustrated the key factors that students believed were significant elements that interactively (re)constructed their fluid changes of agency, identity, and belonging. Specifically, ICTs (especially Internet-based tools), different assessment modes,

contrasting teaching strategies, and different university academic cultures were identified as critical variables in a mixed vertical and horizontal in-between space that allowed students to shape their dynamic learning processes in the 2+2 setting. In short, the 2+2 setting created an extended in-between learning space for students.

6.2.3.1 A dilemma of learning mediation: Making students in between textbooks and ICTs.

According to the analysis of students' applications of ICTs, I surprisingly found that most students had dramatically different uses of the Internet in the transition from China to Australia. In the Chinese context, according to the findings, the Internet-based tools were not adopted to support students' learning activities but utilised mainly for entertainment. This finding concurs with many previous studies found that there was limited use of Internet-based tools for academic purposes and that many students mainly used them for social communications (e.g. Shao, 2012; Tegegne & Chen, 2003). The research findings regarding ICT infrastructure in the Chinese context indicated that although many Chinese universities have established ICT-based learning environments, the quality of ICT hardware seemed to have various problems that negatively influenced students' applications of ICT tools for learning purposes. As a result, in the first two years of study in the Chinese stage, ICTs were not effectively adopted as learning mediation, which potentially shaped students' limited technology-based study experiences, even though they are considered as a digital generation in the modern technological era.

These findings indicated various differences and similarities compared with previous studies. On the one hand, these current findings are different from the previous claim that ICTs have changed traditional textbook-based learning strategies in the Chinese context (J. Q. Li & Sun, 2004). However, the present study found that many students had limited usage of ICTs in the Chinese phase of their 2+2 programmes. The primary learning focus was still textbook-based resources, which is consistent with results concluded by N. Li and Kirkup (2007), who argued that most Chinese students in their study paid more attention to textbook-based resources and other materials distributed by lecturers rather than ICTs. Traditional Chinese culture in education might potentially influence people's perceptions of the role of textbooks and ICT-based tools in learning and teaching practices.

The students' experiences echoed those found in many previous studies that investigated cultural influences on the role of textbooks in learning in China (G. Hu, 2002; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006;

Lu, Chin, Yao, Xu, & Xiao, 2010). As G. Hu (2002) identified, the Chinese educational system seemed to emphasise the importance of textbooks in teaching and learning processes. Under the influences of traditional Chinese culture, people commonly believed that books are the spring of knowledge. A famous traditional saying indicates that "books could give people treasures; books could build golden houses." In Chinese, this saying refers to *"书中自有黄金屋, 书中自有颜如玉"*. These cultural features potentially impacted on the research participants' views toward different learning mediation and the usage of ICTs for formal learning. As many students in this study suggested, they were used to concentrating on textbook-based knowledge in China because they had studied using such a model for a long time. This would seem to suggest that they were deeply influenced by the Chinese historical culture of learning. Studying in a context that lacks ICTs and low usage of them for educational purposes, positioned these students in a physical learning place with limited understandings of ICT-assisted learning modes. As a result, students did not have opportunities to experience much ICT-based learning at their Chinese universities. The Chinese experiences negatively impacted on many students' technological adjustment in the move from China to Australia.

When these students moved to Australia, many of them felt unfamiliar with learning in an ICT-based mode, as they did not have such experiences when they were in China. For instance, Jiufu and Jiaojiao felt isolated from the ICT-based learning context after coming to Australia. Similar findings were also suggested by S. Bennett, Bishop, Dalgarno, Waycott, and Kennedy (2012), who found that due to the lack of computer-assisted learning experiences, although many Chinese students had enough confidence in using ICTs, they may not have a profound realisation of how to adopt ICTs to support their study. After becoming familiar with the ICT-based learning context, many students were able to adjust their learning approach to being more ICT-assisted rather than textbook-focused.

As many students indicated, they would not be able to study if they did not have ICTs at Australian universities. This finding highlights the significance of ICTs in Chinese students' learning at Australian universities. Compared with their Australian peers, however, Corrin et al. (2010) noticed that many Australian students did not frequently adopt ICTs to support their study, but also used them mainly for everyday life uses. Compared to these experiences of different cohorts as international and domestic students, it seems that many Chinese 2+2 students may have more reliance on ICTs in their study than their Australian peers, which might have been a result of Chinese students' language

barriers or other issues. This finding could partly add evidence to a research gap mentioned by Henderson et al. (2015), who suggested the need to explore the differences in using ICTs for learning between domestic and international students at Australian universities.

Considering the literature of TNHE and CFCRS, this finding partly concurs with results concluded by Hou (2011), who found that many students in a China-UK cooperative programme started to use more Internet-based tools to support their study after moving to the UK, because of the better availability and accessibility of ICTs in the UK context. According to this evidence, it seems that the applications of ICTs in 2+2 students' learning from China to overseas places a demand upon students, which might lead to a technological shock when they move across systems.

When students transfered from a limited ICT-based context to a highly ICT-assisted mode, many of them were potentially positioned in between a physical place and virtual space. Meanwhile, ICTs seemed to become much more critical for students' learning in Australia, as they not only needed to adjust to the new ICT-based context but also to seek learning support from China and other resources via the virtual worldwide network. Their experiences might reveal that the rapid development and extensive applications of ICTs locate diaspora in between the different countries and cultures (Rizvi et al., 2016). In doing so, a blended learning context reshapes many students to become in-between learners who are immersed simultaneously in both physical and virtual learning spaces.

6.2.3.2 Assessment: Making students in between different learning stress.

Assessment, as an essential element in education, directly influences what and how students learn to some extent (Tang, 1991). In the Chinese stage, textbook-based exams were the dominant assessment approach in most students' learning. According to J. Li (2001), the examination has become a symbol of Chinese education. The current study found similar results to research conducted by H. Yin, Wang, and Han (2016) and Z. Zhang, Hu, and McNamara (2015). They respectively found that many students experienced textbook-based, exam-dominant assessment approaches at Chinese universities. Learning in such a mode, many students focused on memorising textbook-based knowledge and passing exams, which confirmed that assessment significantly influenced the knowledge students focused on in learning (Scouller, 1998).

Such an assessment mode might have led many students to become demotivated. As H. Yin et al. (2016) identified, at many Chinese universities, assessment is adopted as a way to monitor learning activities, which might result in students developing passive attitudes toward their study. In China, assessment is not widely used to facilitate active engagement in learning. As a result, many students only focus on the knowledge that could be examined in tests (Biggs, 2003). In the Australian learning stage, assessment became multiple and continuous, which required students to become active in their daily study to deal with different tasks. Textbooks become less important in the Australian stage, and many students did not even have textbooks. This approach motivated students to expand their explorations rather than highly rely on memorisation of textbooks (J. Wang, 2016a). Facing these assessment changes, many students struggled, but they were able to survive and then adjust to this different assessment context. By studying in this mode, many students spontaneously adopted multiple approaches to deal with different types of assessment, for example, using Internet-based tools. As a result, no matter whether these students actively engaged in such a stressful assessment mode or not, they were pushed to make changes in order to pass each task.

The different assessment modes across 2+2 programmes position students in between different tasks, learning strategies, and stress. This experience not only challenged stereotyped views of Chinese students, but also affirmed that Chinese students were able to interchangeably adopt different or even opposing learning approaches depending on their particular learning context (Biggs, 1996b; J. Li, 2009). The assessment differences from China to Australia not only reconstructed students' agency and identity as learners, but also indicated a relationship between the assessment mode and the application of ICTs. As many students' learning experiences indicated, it seems that when they studied in an assessment model that was mainly based on textbook-based summative exams, they tended not to utilise ICTs as learning assisted tools frequently in their learning. Under this assessment mode, learning seemed to happen in physical places of the classroom and the textbook. However, when they studied in a mode that had multiple and continuous assessments, students seemed to be more likely to use ICTs and the Internet to deal with different assignments. In this case, we might say they studied in a place but also in a space that was constructed by both physical and virtual elements (Brennan, 2006).

Along with the changes in assessment modes from China to Australia, teaching strategies were also seen as an essential aspect of continually shaping and reshaping students' agency, identity, and belonging.

6.2.3.3 Teaching strategy: Positioning students in between follower and explorer.

Teaching, assessment, and learning interactively influence each other. In this study, the research findings indicate that many lecturers in the Chinese stage usually adopted didactic teaching approaches mainly focusing on the textbook-based knowledge that could be tested in exams. As results reported in Chapter 5 indicated, many lecturers were usually at the centre of the classroom. In that situation, many students became followers without opportunities for independent exploration, as teaching was mainly based on textbook-based knowledge with limited usage of ICTs.

The findings related to teaching and ICTs generally suggested that faculty factors directly impacted students' usage of ICTs as learning mediation (Khan, 2017). These features were also identified by other studies (e.g. Shao, 2012; Wong et al., 2015; Wu, 2015) that found that many Chinese lecturers did not usually teach through adopting various ICT-based strategies. According to these features, it is clear that when lecturers did not adopt ICT-based tools to support instruction, students had limited opportunities to experience ICT-based teaching practices. Learning in this teaching mode, many students were used to listening and following, as such approaches ensured they knew what would be tested in exams.

As Jiaojiao's experience indicated, even though many foreign lecturers taught in her programme at her Chinese university, their teaching strategies seemed to be localised and similar to the approaches that were adopted by other Chinese lecturers who used didactic methods. The students argued that the most significant benefit to them from having foreign lecturers participate in their Chinese programmes was the improvement of their English. As many students indicated (e.g. Lamei and Jiaojiao) in this research study, they had opportunities to learn English from foreign lecturers when they were in China. Furthermore, many lecturers from partner universities also taught some discipline courses in China, which might allow students to experience the "foreign education" before going overseas. However, according to Jiaojiao's experiences, it seems that she did not deeply engage in a positive in-between space of different teaching approaches adopted by Chinese and foreign

lecturers respectively at her Chinese university. Instead, her foreign lecturers seemed to adjust to the Chinese style, which meant that she did not experience anything different in the Chinese stage.

The lecturer-guided teaching suggests that they are the centre of teaching and learning activities. Similar results were found by T. Wang and Shan (2007) who compared a group of Chinese postgraduate students' learning experiences in China and Australia. Their study indicated that many Chinese lecturers dominated teaching activities. These features are also consistent with the argument reported by Chan (1999), who identified that the instruction mode in the Chinese context is usually teacher-centred and learner-passive. Learning in this mode, students usually passively accepted knowledge, rather than actively participated in teaching and learning, and also lacked independence and creativity (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997). Compared with previous research, it seems that these interviewees experienced the typical Chinese traditional teaching mode, even though they were studying in international 2+2 programmes.

In contrast, many Australian lecturers seemed to be facilitators who adopted multiple teaching strategies, which meant that students were able to have more individual exploration in learning by adopting different approaches. The Australian lecturers offered more opportunities for students to engage in teaching and learning processes via more interactions and communications. Many interviewees suggested that although most lecturers still guided the teaching activities in the classroom, they encouraged students to participant in the process, rather than just listen and follow taught content without progressive thinking. It seemed that students had opportunities to be at the centre of their study rather than be simply followers. These findings are also in line with T. Wang and Shan's (2007) research finding that Australian lecturers usually facilitate learners to be independent and autonomous, motivating them to explore knowledge. Considering the teaching practices in other 2+2 programmes, Briguglio and Smith (2012) found that Australian teaching practices were more effective in motivating students to engage in learning actively and to foster independence. As Hammond and Gao (2002) suggested, Western learning systems emphasise that student-teacher cooperation co-constructs knowledge via different types of communication and multiple interactions, more so than a traditional teacher-centred model.

Although this strategy motivates students to become autonomous and the centre of their learning, as many students reflected, such an approach can lack in-depth teaching. Sometimes the

students seemed not to be able to learn detailed knowledge. As mentioned above, some students learned more content from the Internet than their lecturers, which seemed not to be value for money to many of the students. This finding resonates with results concluded by Wong et al. (2015), who noticed that many Chinese students worried about the quality of teaching in Australia because many lecturers usually did not teach knowledge in detail. They also found that such experiences confirmed that many students preferred to study in the Chinese teaching modes. Based on these findings, it is necessary to consider how to balance lecturers' teaching practices and Chinese students' learning preferences, and their academic requirements (Heffernan et al., 2010).

The Australian and Chinese experiences indicate a dilemma in respect of teaching strategies. It is apparent that each teaching approach has advantages and disadvantages. Different students also reflect various views towards the transitions in relation to teaching strategies. To achieve their academic goals, they constantly negotiated with the new context and continued to compare the Australian teaching approaches with those in China. In the Australian context, nonetheless it seemed that some students became more independent, but they were still not intrinsically motivated. They still preferred the Chinese pedagogical style. In this case, people should critically absorb the essence and reject the dross, which could be explained by a traditional Chinese proverb: "*Qu Qi Jing Hua, Qu Qi Zao Po*" *(取其精华，去其糟粕).*

The dilemma of teaching approaches in 2+2 programmes indicated that teaching activities in many 2+2 programmes might not be well articulated between Chinese and Australian lecturers. Similarly, Zhuang and Tang (2012) also identified that many lecturers in China-UK programmes usually taught in traditional teacher-centred approaches without enough English-based teaching activities in the Chinese phase. In this case, it was difficult for students to be familiar with the student-centred learning mode in the UK context. These findings concur with results concluded by Ng and Nyland (2016) who found that many Chinese lecturers did not know how Australian lecturers teach in the Australian context in a China-Australia articulation programme and vice versa. In this case, lecturers usually taught students by using their usual approaches without consideration being given to appropriate articulation between teaching approaches across the two HE systems. This research has shown that this lack of articulation influenced students' views and learning experiences in their 2+2 programmes. Studying in this mode, as many students' experiences indicated, students faced

various difficulties in the transition from China to Australia, which made some of them have negative experiences in their articulation programmes.

6.2.3.4 University academic culture: Locating students in between collectivism and individualism.

If the above aspects reflect specific academic elements, the university context can be regarded as a holistic environmental factor that creates different cultures for these students in their 2+2 programmes. As the results indicated, the Chinese university had a strong sense of collective culture in both learning and living. Participants were grouped as one class at their Chinese universities in the first two years. They usually had similar class schedules, which meant that they had more opportunities to rely on other peers for learning. For daily life, as most students were living in residence halls, they potentially established a collective context. In this context, students were easily influenced by other peers. As the result showed, most peers paid attention to play instead study, and it was difficult for a student to avoid such influences.

These experiences concur with Hofstede's (2001) general account of collectivism of Chinese culture, which usually emphasises that people belong to a tightly knit group and they usually follow group norms to conduct their activities in highly collectivist settings. Notably, no significant differences in respect to the general learning environment in the 2+2 mode emerged from these 2+2 students' learning experiences compared with other studies. Other studies investigated Chinese students' different learning experiences between Chinese and foreign sociocultural contexts (Heffernan et al., 2010; Z. C. Zhang & Zhou, 2010; C. Zhu, Valcke, & Schellens, 2008). This might suggest that although 2+2 programmes were based on cooperation between Chinese and foreign partners, students in many such programmes were still studying in a collective setting in the first two years at Chinese universities and then changed to an individual context at Australian universities. It seemed that cultural features significantly influenced the class setting and operation in 2+2 programmes.

In the Australian context, it seems that the feature of individualism is distinct, as most students had their own learning plan and usually lived in different places, which reduced opportunities for interactions and influences between students. Due to individual preferences, some students were able to adjust to such a highly independent context, but some of them struggled with being individuals

without enough external support in the processes of intercultural adjustment. Their experiences indicated features of individualism that emphasise self-regulation, limited integration and individual behaviours (Hofstede, 2001). The different settings and university contexts actually reflected the different sociocultural features of China and Australia respectively. As previous research has summarised, the Chinese context is more collective, but Australian society seems to be more individual, which helps constitute many students in these programmes as in-between dependent and independent learners.

My research has shown that the students in the Australian phase had to become more individual in orientation. This finding is different from that of Hou (2011), who argued that the 2+2 setting allows students to learn as a group in a foreign university. According to the features of 2+2 programmes, theoretically, students can move to Australia and learn together as a group, which is similar to their Chinese experiences. However, as my research indicated, practically, it was challenging in the Australian context for the students to study and live as a group of 2+2. This was due to a number of factors, for example, the achievement of IELTS, course selection, and open campus settings. It seems that these students experienced the change from being a member of the fixed group to being an individual without strong group-based connections. Such change positioned students in between a sense of group and individual.

According to the research findings to address sub-question two, it is worthwhile to note that ICTs, assessment mode, teaching strategies and the university cultures interactively created the in-between learning space for the 2+2 students. In this space, students can experience various educational features. In the process of studying in the 2+2 programme, students could also have self-evaluations of their learning experiences. As the research findings suggested, most participants (e.g. Dongdong, Lamei, Jiaojiao, Haohao, Shuoshuo, Gaogao, Baobao, Qianqian, and Dengdeng) indicated positive attitudes to study in such an in-between learning space in their 2+2 programmes. In contrast, several students (e.g. Jiufu, Yuner, and Qihao) seemed to be not very satisfied with their programmes because of various issues, such as individual preferences of learning strategies and lacks capabilities to adjust to the new system, peer relationships, heavy academic workload, and assessment pressures.

Although these aspects identified by the research participants did not cover all important factors that play different roles in shaping the 2+2 in-between learning experiences, they could pinpoint the major issues related to students' lived learning reactions towards the cross-system setting. My individual experiences also indicate such complicated transformative experiences and multiple views towards these different aspects. Although it is difficult to simply judge learning quality in 2+2 settings by providing limited evidence, however, such vivid experiences on this particular type of articulation education could add some insights into the existing knowledge.

These findings could indicate that there are many practical gaps that exist in the learning process of CFCRS programmes. Such differences in using ICTs, assessment arrangements, teaching strategies lead to imbalanced learning experiences from China to Australia. These aspects found in this study are contradictory to what scholars argued that home and host universities should realise the equivalence issues in teaching and learning practices (T. Wang, 2016b). This is because the imbalanced practices could make students stressful during the cross-system transition (T. Wang, 2016b). Furthermore, these aspects (e.g. ICTs, assessment, teaching strategies, and university cultures) between the Chinese and the Australian universities in the 2+2 setting echo Otten's (2003) argument that "a common problem for all institutions is that they do not allow differences in interaction because all unknown and unexpected differences are disturbing elements to the institutional procedures" (p. 16). As a result, the quality of learning in CFCRS could be a problem to some extent due to the academic asymmetry between different institutions, especially when the two universities have dramatically different environments of culture and education (Otten, 2003).

According to the analysis and discussion of Chinese students' learning experiences in their 2+2 programmes, it is worth noting that although many research participants could actively cope with the educational differences and thus gain positive experiences of adjustment to each context, some of them still felt it was difficult to engage in the transition of places. The educational inconsistencies between institutions suggest that it is essential to consider how universities adjust to the students who have different learning requirements, and capabilities to study in multiple educational contexts.

6.2.4 Learning with a sense of in-betweenness.

According to the above discussion of my research findings, it is clear that the concept of in-betweenness plays a crucial role in understanding Chinese students' learning experiences in their 2+2

programmes and also in relation to my individual story. Learning is a complex concept, and it is difficult to define it comprehensively. In this study, learning refers to various aspects, such as students' intentions to deal with academic tasks, their strategies and attitudes to study in each site, and their adjustments to different educational contexts. Based on students' multiple learning experiences, specifically, the concept of in-betweenness is essential for analysing and understanding the various changes of identity, agency, and belonging that 2+2 students experienced in the process of transition. In this study, in-betweenness indicates the following axes.

First, the concept of in-betweenness refers to the experiences of the research participants who studied in 2+2 programmes. Notably, not all students developed their senses of in-betweenness with positive experiences and attitudes. Some of them seemed to position themselves in-between different learning spaces, but actually, they may still prefer to be a "traditional" Chinese student who was genuinely used to the Chinese educational system. As the research findings suggested, different students had different senses of identity, agency, and belonging that regularly changed in the transition from China to Australia. In this process, learning happened in different spaces and places with many interconnections between the home and the host cultural, educational, and social contexts. Studying in such a multiplex mode, students developed their sense of in-betweenness and potentially became in-betweeners who had critical views towards the changes and differences of educational places. This might also be seen as a diasporic experience with the research participants living and learning effectively within and between two places and in multiple spaces.

In the process of experiencing the different places (e.g. Chinese and Australian universities), many students positioned themselves in a space that allowed them to engage in both Chinese and Australian education via different approaches (e.g. ICT-assisted or traditional text and class-based learning). Such multiple learning strategies potentially motivated many students to have a sense of in-betweenness, who were able to derive benefits from both sides of their 2+2 programmes. In this case, this doctoral research would suggest that the concept of in-betweenness is a productive and useful one to describe the students in 2+2 or other such kinds of programmes and their multiple experiences and adaptations across the period of their degree study. Additionally, it is worthwhile noting that not all students were actually able to embrace this sense of in-betweenness and eventually adopt positive attitudes regarding their intercultural learning and the adjustments they had to go through. For instance, as mentioned above, Yuner, although she physically studied in Australia, she

did not want to engage in the new learning mode actively, or she was intensely used to the Chinese context, which made her have a strong sense of 'traditional' Chinese student. Therefore, it seemed that such students also became in-betweeners, but ones who negatively confronted the cross-system differences that this research has identified.

In this process, students remade themselves as intercultural learners "in-between" different smooth and striated spaces that were mapped by the combination of different educational systems. They were not restricted though to specific places and spaces; instead, they studied in-between these geographical and spatial contexts with dynamic changes of agency, identity, and belonging. Enabled by ICTs, these places and spaces are mixed through such articulation education programmes. Under this educational model, on the one hand, students have to experience the process of being in-between with either positive or negative attitudes towards these accompanying changes. On the other hand, due to programme design issues and educational differences, these students were pushed to shape a sense of in-betweenness, even though this was not intentional in terms of programme goals. Students' attitudes towards cross-system changes and educational features of such articulation education worked together to position these intercultural learners in-between different places and spaces. This sense of in-betweenness might be seen as an unintended consequence of the lack of clear and close articulation between the Chinese and Australian component parts of the 2 + 2 programmes. Paradoxically, this unintended consequence probably prepared these students well for cosmopolitan futures.

Second, the concept of in-betweenness has been used to describe my individual learning experiences as a former international 2+2 student in Australia. According to my descriptions of my personal learning experiences in my 2+2 programme, it is apparent that I actually experienced the process of shaping my sense of in-betweenness. Similar to many research participants in this study, I also studied in different places (e.g. Chinese and Australian universities) that provided me with various memories of each place. Then in the process of studying in Australia, I also started to become an in-betweener who studied in an in-between space rather than being solidly grounded in one place without constant interactions with the homeland. As my narrative suggested in Chapter 4 and 5, I seem to not mentally belong to either China or Australia but to an in-between space that combines and mixes different educational, social, and cultural features, even though I need to physically study and live in one country like any other people. In the process of dealing with the differences between

various cultures, educational systems, and societies, my sense of agency also becomes in-between of disempowered and empowered. As a result, my sense of identity starts to become complicated in this continually negotiating processes between different contexts. Finally, my sense of in-betweenness is dynamically shaped with fluid changes depending on the context that I live and study in.

Third, the concept of in-betweenness has also been utilised in this research to refer to my positionality as a PhD researcher who has experienced several academic changes in the process of doing this doctoral study. As an in-betweener who had 2+2 learning experiences, as mentioned in Chapter 3, I positioned myself as both an insider and outsider for this doctoral research. Practically, such a position could be regarded as an in-between researcher who had fluid roles as both insider and outsider in the process of doing this doctoral study. It seems that I started to shape my sense of in-betweenness when I selected my learning through the 2+2 programme. Then, after studying in a new place (Australia), I further developed a strong sense of in-between. Although my 2+2 learning experiences had potentially shaped my sense of in-betweenness, the different changes that I experienced during this doctoral study further strengthened my identity and positionality.

Last but not the least, influenced by Bhabha's concept of third space and Deleuze and Guattari's smooth and striated space, I argued that such articulation education, for example, the 2+2 mode in this doctoral study, potentially created an in-between learning space for students to experience cross-system transitions. Notably, according to students' different views towards Chinese and Australian educational contexts, I suggested that each context might be seen as a striated learning space. In each striated space, students needed to follow certain rules in their learning processes. Meanwhile, students smoothly developed their approaches to studying in different striated spaces. In this process, they potentially established the specific smooth spaces that allowed and enabled them to deal flexibly with different rules in a striated space. As students' experiences suggested, some of them were able to develop their smooth spaces actively in each context. It seemed that their smooth spaces were more potent than a local striated space.

In contrast, some students were negatively influenced by striated spaces. As a result, although they tried to establish their smooth spaces, it seemed that striated spaces created many barriers for them to overcome problems. Thus, a group of students were able to flexibly shift themselves in between striated and smooth spaces in one context (e.g. China). Yet, when they moved from China

to Australia, they were also able to shift as intercultural learners in between these two contexts and developed new smooth spaces in the Australian context. In contrast, some other students felt challenged to establish their suitable smooth spaces in their cross-place transitions (or different striated spaces).

According to the above analysis, it is worth noting that such 2+2 programme creates different layers of in-between spaces for students in a cross-place setting. First, the 2+2 setting is a general in-between learning space with a combination of different places (e.g. China and Australia). Second, each place has its specific striated space to rule and frame students' learning activities. In each place, students reflected various attitudes and different abilities to adjust to different striated space, and in the process developed their smooth spaces. Third, when they moved from China to Australia, students were immersed in a more complicated space. They not only shifted their places but also engaged in a new striated space. In this case, they began to develop new smooth spaces to survive in this new striated space. During this process, they were not only just in between smooth and striated spaces in the Australian context, but also in between Chinese and Australian HE systems via networked space created and facilitated by Internet-based technologies. As a result, with a sense of in-betweenness, they were studying in contexts that were mixed, cross-places and spaces.

According to the exploration of research participants' experiences and reflecting on my individual learning experiences, it seems that the CFCRS programme (in this study a 2+2 articulation programme) offered both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, as many students suggested, such programmes offered them opportunities to experience educational differences in a particular pathway. On the other hand, several students' stories indicated many issues existed in running such a programme, for example, the disconnections or dis-articulations between learning contents, teaching strategies, ICT usage, and assessments. These practical problems made many students feel that it was difficult to adjust to the new context in their transitions from China to Australia. This remained the case for many, even though some adopted strategies to constantly interact with the home country to seek assistance, which potentially created an in-between learning space in this process. For students, who did not positively study in the in-between learning space, although they also shared several experiences of communicating with their home county, they may not be able to be considered as in-betweeners who actively engage in this intercultural learning. In contrast, they may be regarded as in-betweeners who had been significantly influenced by their home context with strongly

contradicted sense of acceptance or adjustment to the new education context. Therefore, it is thus essential to consider these practical problems in designing and running such CFCRS education as different students could indicate various senses of identity, agency, and belonging. The evidence in this study has demonstrated that more consideration needs to be given to better articulating the two parts of 2+2 programmes to offer a higher quality of education and help more students to engage in the process of being positively in-between actively.

6.3 Contributions and Implications

One of the significant contributions of this study is its topic, namely, how Chinese students experienced learning in China-Australia 2+2 programmes. This research has added several insights into existing literature of cross-border or transnational higher education as students' lived experiences are under-investigated, especially in the Chinese context (Qin & Te, 2016). More specifically, due to the various types of TNHE, limited studies have investigated students' learning in a 2+2 setting, which is one of main models of CFCRS programmes (Mok & Ong, 2014). Such a setting allows students to achieve international mobility and bring various potential unknown research issues for both TNHE and intercultural learning (Hou et al., 2014). Practically, although I did not track a group of students from the beginning of their first two years in China to Australia, I illustrated students' journeys via hearing their own accounts, which is a reasonable perspective to reveal the long 2+2 learning processes in a limited time period via comparatively analysing students' Chinese and Australian stories.

This study investigated multiple cases of 2+2 students who were studying in different programmes. In the existing literature of exploring Chinese students' learning experiences in such articulation programmes, most studies (e.g. Hou, 2011; F. Wang et al., 2016; H. Yang & Lesser, 2017; Zhao, 2017) focused on students in one programme without extension to other samples. Although the current research was not able to widely investigate issues associated with one specific programme, this study illustrated various learning stories from different students who studied in multiple majors, programmes, and stages. These cases show not only many common issues about intercultural learning and adjustment in the 2+2 setting, but also reveal various individual differences, for example, the different sense of agency, identity, and belonging in experiencing the in-betweenness.

This study has not only illustrated how students experienced learning in different contexts but also examined and further refined existing theoretical models of intercultural adjustment in this particular case. On the one hand, this research analysed learning situations (e.g. approaches, issues, and values) in each context, rather than only focused on exploring their transitional experiences. Based on students' multiple stories, this study affirmed that many research participants' experiences could be explained by the stress-adaptation-growth cycle of intercultural adjustment. In contrast, many experiences indicated that students were not able to achieve theoretical growth, but instead actually passively dealt with intercultural barriers.

On the other hand, this study refined the previous model (e.g. Gill's transformative learning framework) as it suggested that students in 2+2 settings actually started to experience intercultural learning when they selected 2+2 programme as a pathway to conduct their higher education. The intercultural adjustment can happen in advance before students' movement to a foreign context. Furthermore, based on research findings of students' intercultural adjustment in their 2+2 learning journeys, this study indicates that although most participants could positively achieve development, which affirmed Gill's (2007) transformative learning model, some students' stories argued that they might not be able to reach this so-called progressive stage. Therefore, this study suggests that such intercultural adjustment process could be re-theorised or renamed as "uncertainty-negotiate-change". The stress-adaptation-growth model may still be capable of describing a long-term pattern of development amongst learners, even though it does not seem to be able to precisely account for the intercultural learning experiences of some individuals due to their stages of intercultural learning (e.g. Yuner and Jiufu).

Specifically, "negotiate" means that students do not just simply follow and adjust to the new system; in contrast, they can critically compare and evaluate the differences between home and host contexts. In this negotiation process, students may position themselves in between their used system and new context, which shaped the sense of in-betweenness. Finally, the "change" means that they can find their ways to study and live in the new context, but the changes may be not only positive but also negative or even more complicated to be in-between different views and attitudes towards their intercultural learning and adjustment.

This study utilised several concepts about space (e.g. Bhabha's third space, Deleuze and Guattari's smooth and striated space) to theorise the 2+2 programme as an in-between learning space between the Chinese and Australian systems. Specifically, ICTs, assessments, teaching strategies, and university academic atmosphere were considered as crucial elements that dynamically (re)shaped students' sense of agency, identity, and belonging during their 2+2 programmes. In this in-between space, they critically compared and reacted to these different educational contexts, which indicates their sense of in-betweenness as 2+2 students. Importantly, in this 2+2 learning space, ICTs were found as important mediation for students to negotiate the educational differences in their learning practices. Previous research in intercultural adjustment has limited focuses on the role of ICTs as a significant aspect in (re)shaping students' agency, identity, and belonging in such articulation education. This research highlights the important role of ICTs in students' articulation programme and intercultural adjustment. The different applications of ICTs as learning mediation in different education could raise technological shocks for students.

This study adopted reflexive-narrative approaches to analyse and present students' 2+2 learning stories, as these were also informed by my retrospective reflections. Although this approach is not new, it has not been not widely adopted in analysing students' learning experiences in TNHE. Particularly, the researcher has fluid roles (in between the insider and the outsider) in the research, which added unique insights into reflecting and comparing different 2+2 learning experiences. Furthermore, the researcher's reflexive narrative provided further evidence to indicate the mapping process of an in-between learning space, where he shaped a sense of in-betweenness as a former 2+2 student and a researcher. Such an approach could offer new views to look into the insights of learning experiences.

All students are in between different systems to some extent. However, the research participants' stories, especially the group that showed positive intercultural learning and adjustment processes, further highlighted the sense of in-betweenness as a major feature of learning in 2+2 programmes. These stories of 'in-between' could be complicated and mixed, rather than only positive or negative. Their sense of in-between may be at different levels or degrees. Some students (e.g. Baobao, Haohao, Shuoshuo) may gain more profound sense than others (e.g. Jiufu and Yuner). Different students may have the sense of in-between in different aspects; for example, Jiufu may feel deeply in-between when he used ICTs to assist his study in Australia. Yuner may not have a strong

sense of in-between regarding using ICTs to assist her study in Australia as her story suggested that she was deeply used to textbook-based learning even though she studied in Australia.

Based on students' lived experiences and views towards learning in 2+2 programmes, I propose to provide a series of implications relevant for different stakeholders. For universities that are running or propose to operate such cooperative programmes with foreign partners, it is a necessity to consider the practical issues to offer high quality learning for students rather than theoretically create articulation without deeply considering the learning consistency issues for students. As Zhang and Tobias (2015) advocated, it is important for universities, especially in the Australian context, to carefully consider the international learners' requirements of high-quality education when they try to recruit overseas students and to establish cross-system cooperation with foreign partners. When designing such articulation programmes, it is essential to comprehensively examine language issues, teaching approaches, course content connections, assessments, and other learning-related problems that may bring barriers to the transformative learning. Better articulation is required.

For lecturers who are teaching in such programmes, it is essential to know students' learning experiences from both home and host institutions to adopt suitable approaches for teaching them. In doing so, it might be essential to enhance the communications between lecturers of home and host universities. Last but not least, students should be made aware of the issues of in-betweenness in such articulation programmes. The sense of in-betweenness may start to grow up when these students began their 2+2 learning journeys, but they may not be able to identify and realise this bud. The sense of in-betweenness could be developed along with their learning activities from China to Australia across the intercultural adjustment process. In this process, most students could study in an in-between learning space where they may need to negotiate with cultural, social, and educational differences constantly. Consequently, they may find a position or develop an individual in-between space, which allows them to either positively adjust to the new context or reluctantly survive in between their preferred environment and the stressful context. Therefore, it is crucial for students to prepare for shaping a sense of in-betweenness, which means that they may need to shift their senses of agency, identity, and belonging flexibly.

6.4 Shortcomings of the Study and Future Research

6.4.1 Shortcomings of the study.

First, only students were involved in this study. The primary data was only about students' views without other stakeholders, for example, lecturers, administrators, policymakers. Practically, each programme has its specific cooperative agreements and policies. Universities with their partners may have many interactions at different levels, for example, communications between Chinese and foreign lecturers and policymakers. However, my participants came from different programmes. They were studying in different Chinese universities that are located in different cities. When they came to Australia, they were studying in different universities as well. Therefore, it was difficult for the researcher to get access to their home and host universities to collect data about other stakeholders. Only relying on students' perspectives means it may not be possible to reflect real situations about cooperative issues, for example, teaching practices and programme curriculum designs.

Interviews were adopted as the only data collection approach without other types of data, for example, questionnaire and observations. Several factors limited the selections of data collection methods. On the one hand, when these students were studying in different programmes and universities, it was challenging to get related lecturers to permit my access to their classroom. In this case, I was not able to observe their daily learning activities in detail. On the other hand, due to the individual differences, for example, IELTS issues, these students usually came to Australia depending on their own situations rather than arriving here with other Chinese classmates as a fixed group. In the meantime, in the learning processes, they also did not study as a fixed group, and they started to select different courses. This situation made it difficult to recruit large numbers of students to conduct a survey questionnaire. Furthermore, as my research aim is to hear their lived experiences towards their learning in 2+2 settings, using the interview could let me interact with them directly and ask questions about both Chinese and Australian experiences comparatively. Also, questionnaires cannot allow me to collect data about students' complex subjective experiences.

I mainly focused on learning related experiences without exploring extensive life experiences in intercultural adjustment. According to previous studies, the intercultural adjustment is a complicated issue, and it includes many sub-fields. In this study, as I was interested in students'

perspectives on learning, I did not investigate students' general adjustment issues, for example, engagement in local communities.

6.4.2 Future research suggestions.

Based on the limitations above, I would suggest the following directions for future research. First, future studies could investigate lecturers' teaching strategies in such CFCRS programmes and explore how the curriculum was designed. These aspects appear to directly affect students' learning experiences and the quality of programmes. Second, a future study could comprehensively investigate articulation students' life experiences of intercultural adjustment. As mentioned above, adjustment to local community life could also affect students' intercultural learning experiences. Third, future research could adopt multiple data collection approaches to reflect students' learning experiences from other perspectives. Finally, a future study could investigate students' learning experiences in other types of articulation programmes or transnational educations, as with the growing trend of internationalisation of HE, different types of articulations could offer students various lived experiences in learning and daily life. To evaluate and enhance the quality of such educational services, it is essential for researchers to widely and deeply investigate the real stories of learning, teaching, and programme running.

6.5 Concluding Remark

The increasing trend of globalisation and internationalisation of HE ensures that education will continue to be transferred across the world. The 2+2 programme, as one favorite type of CFCRS model, creates an in-between learning space that allows students to experience different cultures, societies and educational models. This study qualitatively illustrated several Chinese students' lived learning experiences in such an in-between space. Their views, learning practices, and my individual reflexive narratives have added a series of insights into the under-researched domain of students' experiences in TNHE and CFCRS programmes. Students' journeys revealed that their learning experiences in 2+2 programmes were complex and dynamic. Students' learning and adjustment in the 2+2 setting is not a straightforward process and have progressive development, which could be different from the proposed understanding that students usually achieve positive growth after experiencing cross-system barriers and stress (Gill, 2007); rather, it is a process of experiencing and fostering a sense of in-betweenness. They in effect shape a sense of in-betweenness with twists and turns in constant (re)shapes of the sense of agency, identity, and belonging. More particularly, this study found that ICTs, teaching strategies, assessment modes, and university academic cultures are considered as key aspects that influenced students' learning methods, attitudes, adjustment and the establishment of the 2+2 in-between learning space. Finally, this study suggests that it is necessary for policymakers, universities, educators, and students to notice the potential essence of managing, offering, teaching, and studying in articulation education, which could be a process of becoming in-between with endless and constant negations with different educational, cultural, and social contexts. It is also vital for these stakeholders to carefully consider the educational differences in running such programmes to help students engage in the internationalisation of HE in depth rather than just establish theoretical articulation without enough detailed connections that could let students have better intercultural learning experiences.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Ethical Clearance Approval

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Response to Application for Ethical Clearance

Approved

Applicant Name: Kun Dai
Applicant email address: k.dai@uq.edu.au
Participants/Recruitment ok
Project Summary/Research Plan ok
Ethical Considerations ok
Consent Form/Information Sheet ok
Interview Questions ok
Gatekeepers ok
Presentation (correct form, typed, error-free) ok
Comments & Recommendation ok
(Signed) Member of the UQSE Research Ethics Committee: **Amanda Keddie**  **Date. 19th April 2015**

From: Amanda Keddie
Sent: Sunday, April 19, 2015 12:58 PM
To: Ethics - School of Education
Subject: RE: DUE 30 APRIL - Application for Ethical Clearance - DAI, Kun 15-008

Hi Michelle,
Please find attached my report for Kun Dai's ethics application - it is approved following minor amendments to the satisfaction of the supervisor.
Thanks, Amanda

Dr Amanda Keddie | School of Education | The University of Queensland | Brisbane, Australia 4072 | Phone +61 7 336 59029 I Fax +61 7 336 57199 |
New book: Keddie, A. (2012) Educating for Diversity and Social Justice, New York: Routledge

Appendix 2 Participant Information Sheet

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

School of Education

CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 00025B

Dear potential participant:

My name is Kun Dai, and I am a PhD student at the University of Queensland. I am conducting a research study whose title is "An exploration of Chinese students' learning experiences in China-Australia '2+2' articulation programmes: In between two systems". The aim of this study is to explore Chinese students' intercultural learning experiences in China-Australia 2+2 programmes. As a student in a China-Australia transnational programme, you are invited to participate in this study. The learning experiences that you gained in a 2+2 programme are important and will help me to explore the emerged and potential issues of intercultural learning and adjustment in such a particular educational setting.

This research project will take place during February to April 2016, in Australia. You will be asked to participate in individual interviews that will be recorded. There are no potential risks in this study.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without prejudice or penalty. If you wish to withdraw, simply tell the researcher and your participation in this research project will end and any record of the information that you have given to that point will be destroyed and will not be included in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity of data is assured. The data will be stored in a secure computer and a hard drive with password protected access limited directly to the researcher. If you would like to learn the outcome of the study in which you are participating, please feel free to contact me at the email above and I will send you an abstract of the study and details of the findings. You are free to discuss your participation with myself. If you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved in the study, you may contact the University of Queensland Ethics Officer, Michael Tse (e-mail: humanethics@research.uq.edu.au).

You can also contact my principal academic advisor for this study if you have further concerns as follows: Dr. Vicente Reyes: vicente.reyes@uq.edu.au. I thank you for your consideration and hope you will agree to participate in this research project.

Yours sincerely,
Kun Dai

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The University of Queensland, Brisbane QLD 4072, Australia
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Email:k.dai@uq.edu.au

Appendix 3 Informed Consent Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

School of Education

CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 00025B

Project title: An exploration of Chinese students' learning experiences in China-Australia '2+2' articulation programmes: In between two systems.

Informed Consent Form for participants

I, *(participant's name):*

_____

Hereby agree to be a participant in the above research project.

- I have read the information on the Participant Information Sheet which is relevant to this research project and understand that this study will take place over one academic semester.
- I understand that the focus group interviews will be digitally recorded so that the researcher can transcribe the sessions.
- I understand that the researcher conducting this study abides by the principles governing the ethical conduct of research and, at all times, avows to protect the interests of all participants. This form and the accompanying Participant Information Sheet have been given to you for your own protection, and contain an outline of the proposed study.
- I am aware that my participation is confidential, and that I am not making comments or sharing this information with anybody else. I am also aware that I am free to withdraw my participation and my data at any time without penalty. I hereby give consent to participate in the experiment outlined to me in the information sheet.

Researcher's Full Name:	Kun Dai		
Researcher's signature		Date:	

Appendix 4 Interview Questions

Warm up:

1. Could you introduce yourself?
2. Could you talk about your learning experience in your Chinese university?
3. Could you describe your experiences of transnational programmes?

Stage 1:

1. What is your learning goal when you study in your transnational programme?
2. What is your learning goal when you study in your Chinese university?
3. What is your learning goal when you study in your Australian university?
4. How does your learning goal change during your study?
5. What helps you to achieve your learning goal?
6. What kinds of strategies you actually use to support your study?

   Depending on students' different responses, I asked several following questions:

Stage 2:

1. What kinds of problems or difficulties do you have in Chinese and Australian universities?
2. How do your Chinese learning experiences influence Australian study?
3. Are there any changes of your learning attitudes from China to Australia?
4. Could you describe your Internet-based learning experiences in China and Australia respectively?
5. What kinds of Internet-based technology do you usually use in your Chinese and Australian universities?
6. How do you think of the Internet-based technology of university context in China and Australia respectively?
7. How did Internet-based technology help you to achieve your learning goal in China and Australia?

Stage 3:

1. How do you think of learning and teaching approaches in Australian and Chinese contexts?
2. How do you think of the role of lecturers in Internet-based learning environment?
3. What are the differences on Internet-based learning environment between Chinese and Australian universities?
4. How do you think of these differences?

Stage 4:

1. How do you think of yourself as a learner in a 2+2 programme?
2. Could you give us some suggestions about learning across two systems in 2+2 programme?
3. What kind of learning environment do you prefer for your future study?

Appendix 5 Example of Data Analysis Coding

The following table shows Gaogao's coded extracts from her 25-page transcription based on approximately one hour interview. Due to the limited space of the thesis, I used Gaogao's extracts as an example to show my coding and categorising processes. The table below shows the inductive analysis of Gaogao's transcriptions. As the example indicates, her interview responses were labelled in various colours to highlight different categories. On the right side of the table, codes were listed as these were extracted from the transcript. Based on this format, I completed the whole process of coding and categorising all interview transcriptions by hand via the assistance of Microsoft Word in the first round of inductive analysis. Through coding by hand in Microsoft Word, I can easily manage data via copy and paste, flexibly create tables, and change format of layouts depending on my preferences and needs. Finally, approximately 1,090 codes were generated and some of them were coded into one more categories.

Red: Sense of Agency Pink: Sense of Identity Green: Sense of Belongingness Grey: Sense of Agency and Identity Light blue: Sense of Identity and Belongingness } Potential categories generated from the data	Codes
Gaogao **Warm up:** **1. Could you introduce yourself?** I am studying in the major of Graphic Design and Film Production. I completed my first two years of undergraduate study at Shandong University of Arts and I came to Australia in 2014 to conduct my third, fourth year of my "2+2" program. **2. Could you describe your learning experiences of transnational program?** I think the course content of my program in Chinese and Australian universities are quite similar. For example, I learned graphic design foundation courses in my Chinese university and these contents were very helpful to my study when I start my study in Australian university. Furthermore, instructors in Chinese university teach similar design software but my Australian instructors usually introduce more skills through different software. Generally speaking, I think I learn more content in Australia than China, and Chinese learning experiences provide a strong support to my Australian study. **Object:** **1. What is your goal when you chose to study in your transnational program?** In fact, when I was administrated in this program, I did not have a clear understanding of this program, for example, how it works and what I will learn. I just know I need to go to Australian university after two years and also I need pass the IELTS exam. **2. Why choose transnational program?** I am interested in arts-related major; however, I did not want to study in fine art and I prefer to study something new. My program is about technology-based arts and design, which is an up-to-date field. Furthermore, transnational program provided a perfect platform for students to deeply understand both Chinese and foreign universities. Through such program, I wished to have different learning experiences. So I selected this major. **3. What is your learning goal when you study in your Chinese university?** The primary goal is passing all course exams. Further, I need to get a good a score in IELTS. **4. What is your learning goal when you study in your Australian university?** When I arrived at Australian university, I feel I have a lot of pressures. Language problems, different environment, no friend, and family; all these factors actually impact on my study. My basic goal is successful graduation from my bachelor degree. After learning here nearly one year, I think graduation is no problem and I enjoying this study environment. Therefore, I keep working hard and try to get good scores in exams and assignments. Meanwhile, I also want to learn more social and working skills, which	Course content conscience Teaching approaches in China Learning more in Australia than in China Unclear towards the 2+2 program; IELTS focuses Individual learning interests 2+2 program features Passing courses and IELTS Strange in Australia initially Graduations as primary goal; Adaptation to Australia; Being academic achiever; Expectations to adaptation; Being another person

In the process of streamlining the categories that would eventually be used for this thesis, several comparative sessions were undertaken between myself and my PhD supervisors. Using several extracts from the transcripts, these were independently coded by myself and my supervisors. Meetings were then undertaken with the objective of "comparing for agreement" the codes and subsequent categories that emerged from the data analytical approach. Meanwhile, as mentioned in Chapter 3, two PhD colleagues also helped me code interview extracts from one transcription, which allowed me to compare the differences of coding and categorising. Although we had many similar codes, there are still some differences; for example, the ICT-related codes were put into multiple groups (technology in general and the uses of ICTs in learning). Through discussing such detailed differences with peers, I was able to not only critically sort out codes and categories, but also deeply understand students' learning experiences while carefully considering individual differences.

Based on the data analysis, a series of categories – a total of sixteen -- were identified, which are enumerated in the following list.

Key Categories
Motivations
Sense of identity
Sense of agency
Sense of belonging
Learning focuses
Learning strategies
Teaching approaches
Assessment modes
Learning outcomes
University academic culture
Parental influences
Peer relationships
The use of ICTs in learning
English issues
Attitudes towards articulation learning
Adjustment barriers

Although students' interview data indicated different categories, in this study, I further narrowed down my focus into the seven key themes: sense of identity, agency, belonging, the use of ICTs in learning, teaching approaches, assessment modes, and university academic culture. Information from the other categories derived from the data analysis were used as supplementary

content to add further insights into the analysis of the selected categories. As I analysed and reflected in the process of writing this thesis, I considered the seven key themes as the most important aspects that reflected students' learning experiences in their 2+2 articulation programmes as all research participants mentioned content related to these categories.

After completing the inductive analysis, I conducted the deductive analysis based on Gill's (2007) transformative learning framework. Based on the analysis of the inductive round and understanding each individual's learning experiences, I noticed that many students' learning experiences reflected Gill's (2007) three stages of intercultural adjustment. However, as briefly mentioned in Chapter 3, some participants' experiences can provide further insights to challenge and refine Gill's (2007) framework. In doing so, I realised that my collected data can show various interesting and novel insights about students' learning experiences in such articulation programmes compared to many existing studies that mainly focused on intercultural adjustment issues. Based on the inductive and deductive analyses, I started to write my findings in chapters 4 and 5, with the aim of illustrating students' intercultural learning trajectories and the key contextual factors that influenced their experiences in 2+2 programmes. During the writing process of research findings, as mentioned above, I not only followed the key themes that emerged from inductive analysis, but also interacted with Gill's (2007) framework with my individual reflexive narrative.